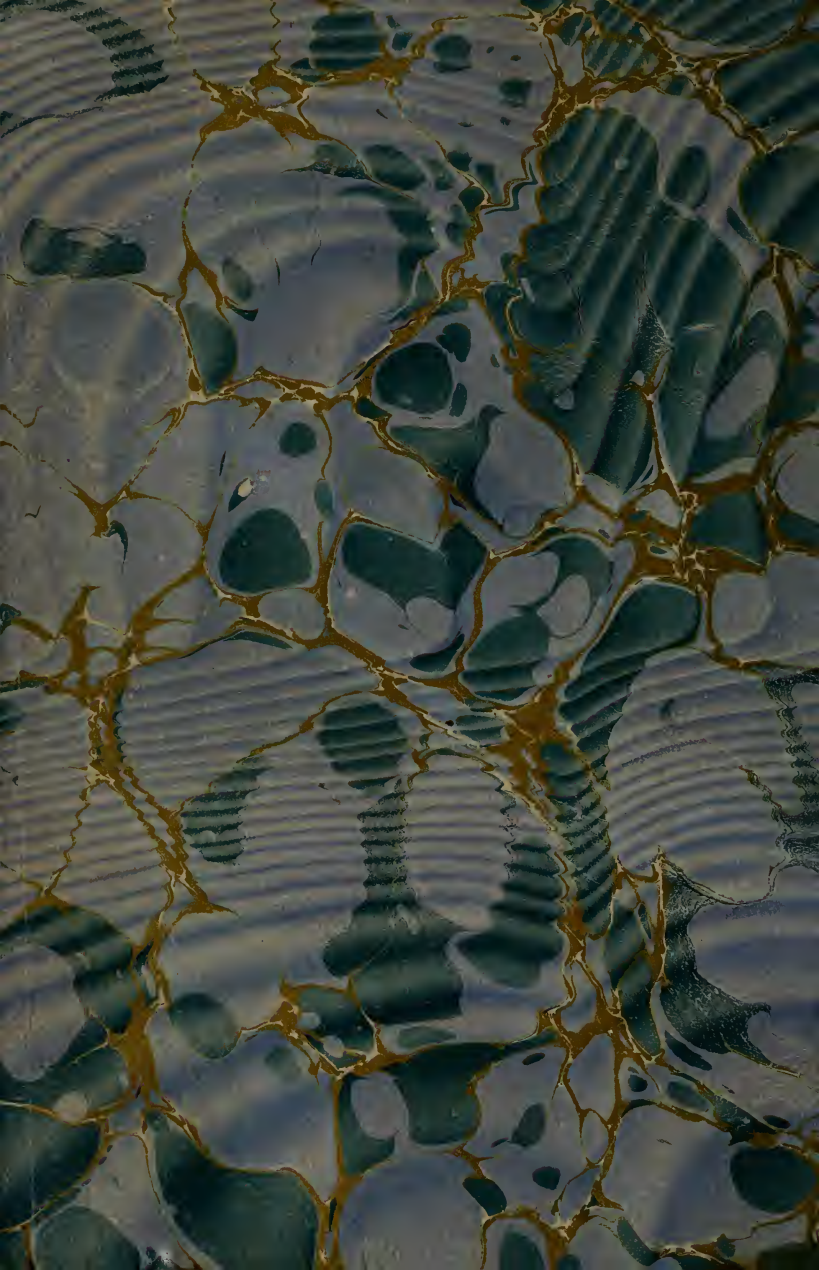
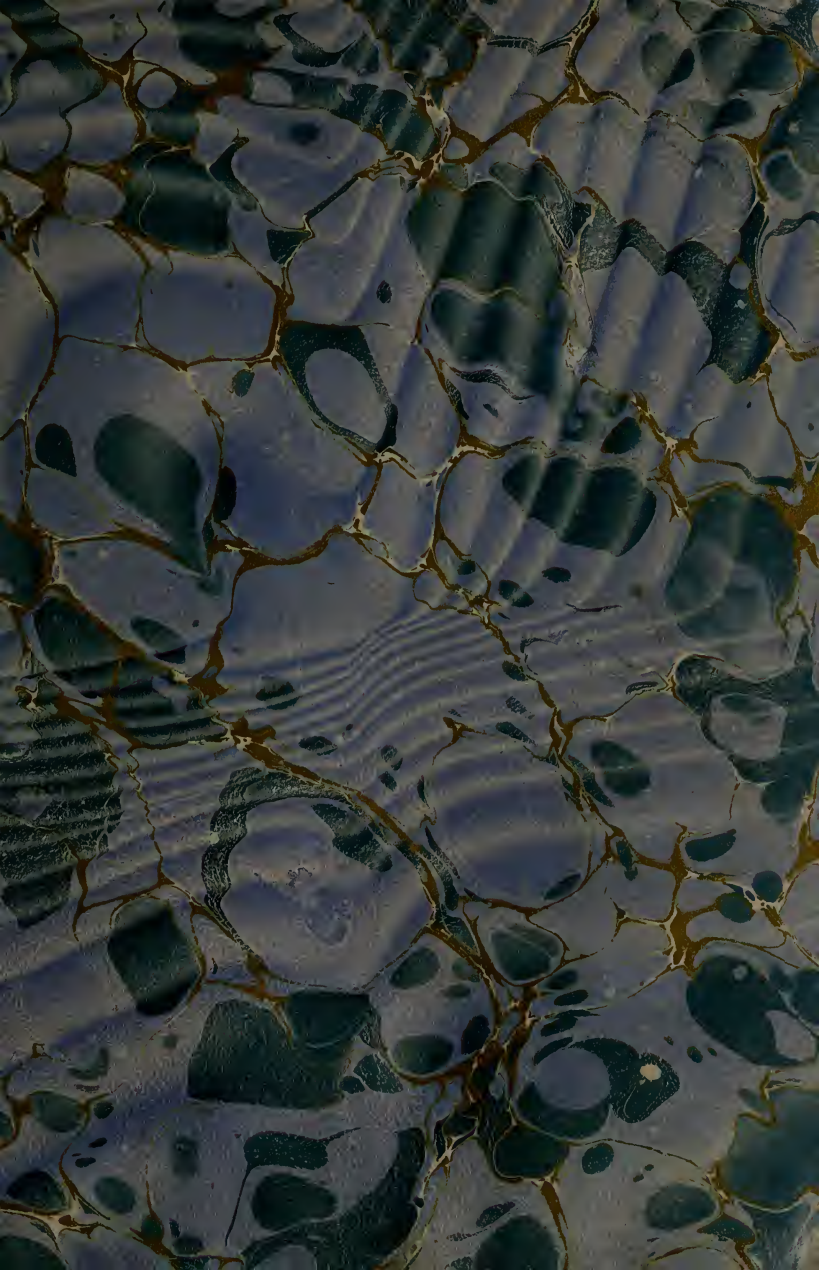
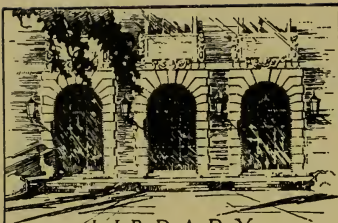


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JEDWOOD JUSTICE

A Novel

BY

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE

AUTHOR OF

'A TANGLED SKEIN,' 'CUT ADRIFT,' 'BAD LUCK,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

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JEDWOOD JUSTICE

CHAPTER I.

THE WOLVES OF LONDON.

THE sap is rising in the London season, and the buds will soon come out. Mr. Macgruther has business in town which brings him up sooner than most smart people, and to-night he is at a 'stag' dinner given by a political chieftain. Mrs. Mac (who does not love her own company, and after eight o'clock is deprived of her children's) bids three intimates to dine and do a play. These are the wife of a Foreign

Office magnate, attended by her husband, and an officer in the guards. Just as the ladies have retired to put on their wraps, there comes a roar and a rattle in the street, and the butler informs them that a tremendous fire is raging down by Belgrave Dock, and a general alarm has been given.

‘Dear me!’ says Mrs. Mac; ‘I’ve never been to a great fire. Do let us go.’

‘Better not,’ from the guardsman.
‘There’s sure to be a mob, and you——’

‘Nonsense! We needn’t go near any mob. We can see it from the carriage.’

So the opposition breaks down, and Mrs. Mac has her way, as is her custom. She is looking more than usually handsome to-night, for the pure Hopshire air has brightened cheek and eye, and the wear and tear of the season has not begun.

And she is dressed to perfection, though only for a theatre. *She never shirks.* Exacting every right that belongs to her beauty and her position, she acknowledges that these have also their duties—one (perhaps the chief) of which is to look as lovely as she can. I will not attempt to describe her dress of to-night. I am a man, and, after my kind, I take three shots at a pretty woman—one at her face, one at her waist, and one at her feet—then I surrender. All the rest is nebulous. In Mrs. Mac's case it would be a cloud of soft gray, with stars in it, and here and there a touch of crimson. Holding together the laces which cross her bosom is a brooch in the shape of trailing fuchsias, in rubies and pearls, and there are brilliants dancing at her ears. Most of this is hid as she departs by a regal cloak of Oriental design,

shimmering with gold, which falls from her shoulders to the ground.

They reach the fire *place*, but cannot well see the fire—four of them—out of one carriage - window. They get out at a corner where there is no crowd. A good-natured shopman drags out a packing-case and places it in the street, for the ladies to stand on.

‘Why, it’s just as if we were in the stalls,’ observes Mrs. Mac. ‘Isn’t it splendid!’

Splendid indeed! except for insurance people and workmen who cannot save their tools. Three large stacks of timber, a factory, and a row of workshops are all aglow, sending waves of flame into the air. The dry timber is full of fireworks of its own; and when the flames reach a warehouse stored with paints and varnish, Mr.

Brock himself might be proud of the result as the cans explode and fill the sky with variegated spangles. Mrs. Mac is delighted.

‘Didn’t I tell you,’ she asks triumphantly, ‘that it would be better than any play?’

By this time the heat has driven other spectators back, and the packing-case is now an island in a sea of crowd. Neither Mrs. Mac nor her companions notice this, so absorbed are they in the fiery conflict before them.

Behind, the wolves of London, drawn from their dens by the scent of riot and plunder, begin to gather in twos and threes, and gangs. Pasty-faced creatures, with shifty eyes and evil-smelling clothes, whose hair has been cut in many a gaol, but their claws—never. They come and foregather with a common instinct, some

for plunder pure and simple, others for a lark, which may become larcenous, but is sure to be brutal. There is some shrill whistling and 'co-oo-ing,' and then comes what we hear of in police reports as 'an ugly rush.' Its course is across the street and towards the fire. It overturns the packing-case ; it takes Mrs. Mac and whirls her along as a chip is carried in a flooded gutter, until, losing its force, it deposits her in a dark street nearly a hundred yards from carriage and friends, and in the midst of the ugly rushers.

'Blow me !' says a husky voice, 'if 'ere ain't a bloomin' duchess in a hoppery cloke ! Give us a shilling, my lady, to drink your 'ealth ; it's blasted 'ot and dry 'ere.'

'Make it a sov, missis,' interposes a big ruffian with a knotted stick. 'It ain't 'olesome for 'im to drink by hisself.'

She recoils from them with a smothered cry of terror, and then comes a push from the rear.

‘Oo are yer a-shoving of?’ snarls a voice behind her, and she is thrust almost into the arms of the first speaker.

The ‘wolves’ of London were all round her.

‘Make way!’ she gasps. ‘Let me pass, or I will call the police!’

‘Oh my! the police? ’Elloa, Jim, go and call a p’liceman for the lady, and hescort her to her carridge. *I’ll* take the hoppery cloke.’

And in an instant it is torn from her shoulders, and she stands in all her delicate finery—dressed for a first night at a smart theatre—in the slush of the dark crowded street, hustled and jeered at.

‘I have no money about me,’ she gasps ;
‘but if you will only let me go now, and
call——’

‘All right, we’re sure to call and ’ave
tea with yer to-morrow ; but now, if you
ain’t got no money, you’ve got somethink
else,’ said the ruffian who had asked for a
shilling. ‘I’d like to see ’ow some of
these shiners ’ud look on my gal,’ and
he seizes her wrist, where the bracelets
glitter.

‘Go it, Bill !’ says the voice from be-
hind. ‘I’ll ’old ’er. Only ’arves, yer
know—fair ’arves.’

So saying, he throws both arms round
her, and a breath of gin and onions passes
her shoulder and sickens her.

Whilst Bill is tugging at her bracelets,
another grimy hand is tearing the front of
her dress to loosen the ruby-pearl fuchsias,

and yet another tries to force an earring which it cannot unfasten through the tender flesh.

Pain and terror give her strength.

‘ Help !—oh, help ! ’ she cries. ‘ Is there *no* help for me ? ’

There is. A flash of brown, with a white blaze in it, breaks through the mob. The man who holds her rolls aside as though a mule had kicked him. The man in front throws up one leg as though he were dancing, but the next movement is a backward one—down he goes, making a dint in the crowd. Next come two slaps, which sound like applause of this performance, but they really are the music of a pair of ‘ facers ’ (right and left), delivered at half-arm distance by a man who knows how to hit from the shoulder. Down go the earring and the fuchsia thieves ; but

in his fall the latter carries with him more than a handful of silk and lace. After one quick glance at the damage done, the striker strips off his great coat, and, turning aside, says :

‘ Throw that round you. No! For God’s sake don’t cling! Leave my arms free! Stand behind me!’

And she thinks she knows the voice.

The mob of roughs, demoralized by the suddenness of the onslaught, slink back a few yards, and someone shouts :

‘ The Slugger’s got a stick. Why the —— don’t ’e use it! ’It ’im on the ’ed! Down the blooming swell!’

The man who now stands before Mrs. Mac is dressed in (so far) immaculate evening dress. He does not say a word, but his eyes follow every movement, and no one ventures within his reach. Sud-

denly something cuts the fiery sky : she hears a sickening 'thud,' her defender's hat falls ; a line of red is ruled (as it were) down the side of his face, and for a moment he staggers.

'Brayvo, Slugger !—'it 'im agin ! Down im this time !' shouts the mob.

He does go down, but voluntarily and in company with his assailant, who after a brief struggle whimpers :

'Kick 'im ; why the —— don't you kick his —— out ? 'Elp ! 'elp ! 'e'll break my arm !'

Then comes a sharp, short cry, and Dick (for Dick it is, sure enough) is up again, with the blackthorn in his hand, laying it about him like the good swordsman that he is.

The same dull 'thud' that she heard before is several times repeated to an

accompaniment of shrieks and curses. Then there comes a measured tramp, tramp, tramp; then a blaze of bull's-eye lanterns; and then—nothing, for she has fainted.

* * * * *

With returned consciousness she finds herself on a sofa in a chemist's shop, with a stinging pain in her left ear, a bad taste in her mouth, a strange man bending over her, and by his side her husband, looking very grave. Instinctively she raises a hand to her bosom, and finds that a man's light brown coat is tied by the arms around her neck and shoulders.

‘Oh, Alec,’ she whispers, ‘I am so sorry! Forgive me! It was all my fault. I would come; but how could I—how could *anyone* imagine——’

‘We will speak about that to-morrow,’

he replies. 'Are you strong enough to walk to the carriage? It is here.'

'Yes, yes; take me home. I shall never feel safe till I am at home. I can walk. Please take me home.'

'I am greatly indebted to you for your kindness, sir,' says Macgruther, addressing the stranger. 'May I ask your name?'

'Grainger, sir—Henry Grainger. I am a surgeon, and have a practice in the neighbourhood.'

'Here is my card. I hope to hear from you soon.'

'Oh, that's nothing!' Grainger replied. Then (after a glance at the card): 'I am very glad to have had an opportunity of serving Mrs. Macgruther.'

'Thank you' (this from the lady herself); 'whatever you have done has made me feel quite strong again. Now, Alec!'

wrapping the overcoat closer around her.

‘I am afraid we shall have to keep your coat, Mr. Grainger,’ says Macgruther, as he gives her his arm to go. ‘In my hurry I left mine behind.’

‘*That* is not my coat.’

‘No?’

‘It belongs,’ says Mrs. Mac, looking down, ‘to the man who saved me.’

‘The man who saved you? I heard that you were rescued by the police.’

‘I dare say they came up *afterwards*—they generally do — but it was Di— it was Lord Wadehurst who saved me. Those dreadful creatures would have torn me to pieces if it had not been for him.’

‘Did he bring you into this danger?’

‘No—oh no! He—but how selfish

I am! It was poor Sophia Le Gray who was with me when——’

‘I have seen Mrs. Le Gray and her husband. They are both safe.’

‘And Captain Fane?’

‘Is able, I presume, to take care of himself; though, if he allowed you to come here, he is not to be trusted with the charge of any woman.’

They have reached the carriage-door. Mrs. Mac—supported on one side by her lord, on the other by Grainger, and having her tattered finery held together by the druggist in the capacity of page—has her foot on the step, when what seems to her a big bag stretched on poles, and carried by four policemen, passes.

‘Is that one of the ruffians, Mr. Walker?’ asks Macgruther, addressing the inspector who follows.

‘Don’t quite know, sir. It might be a gentleman.’

Before a word can be said Mrs. Mac has thrown off her supporters, sprung into the street, halted the stretcher-bearers, and uncovered the face of the ‘it’ that might be a gentleman.

There—with his clothes torn to mud-stained, blood-stained rags; his face pale as death, save where the life-stream trickles; with his left arm twisted unnaturally across his chest—there lies the man who had saved her!

Her lips form the words ‘He is dead!’ but cannot speak them.

‘Let *me* see,’ says Grainger. ‘Pray go back to your carriage, Mrs. Macgruther. I will attend to this.’

But she does not heed him. She keeps on repeating to herself:

‘They have killed him! He is dead, and for *my* sake.’

Her husband is by her side, sterner than ever.

‘Is this the—is this Lord Wadehurst?’ he asks her.

She cannot yet speak. She bows her head four or five times, and looks vaguely from face to face around her.

‘He has a bad cut on the head,’ Grainger reports, ‘and his left arm is broken. Seems as if he had been kicked and trampled on too. There may be other injuries, but I cannot find them as he is now. He must have immediate attention.’

‘Take him to my house,’ says Macgruther.

‘Hospital is better, sir,’ observed Inspector Walker.

‘Take him to my house’ (severely).
‘May I ask you’ (this to Grainger) ‘to accompany him? You will add to my obligations by doing so.’

‘If he be Lord Wadehurst, I have an obligation of my own, Mr. Macgruther. I must go home for some things I am sure to want, but I’ll be with you as soon as he is. Go steady, my men, and keep step, so as not to shake him.’

Then he whispered to Macgruther :

‘I made two stitches in your wife’s ear when she was insensible. Keep a cold-water compress on the tear, and have it attended to, or there will be an ugly scar. Otherwise she is all right. Make her take a glass of champagne when she gets home, and don’t let her talk.’



CHAPTER II.

THE MURDER IS OUT.

WHEN trouble comes upon a man in Devon, the usual question is—or used to be—‘What business had he to be there?’ You may ask, ‘How comes it that Dick—whom you left at Paris—turns up in Belgrave Road just in the nick of time to save Mrs. Mac from the wolves of London?’ You are entitled to an explanation, and it is this. He lost no time. Having telegraphed to Patsey to have all things ready, his plan was to catch the night-boat, run through London, and be at Wadehurst

by noon the next day ; but this ‘ganged agley.’ He had been neglecting his own affairs. Roving, on his quest, from place to place, he could not, or would not, give his agent any reliable address to which his letters could be forwarded ; and there was a stock of them, some demanding immediate attention, awaiting him.

The silver-mines continued to ‘pan out’ handsomely ; the American Congress had passed the Silver Bill ; silver was on the ‘boom,’ and there it was, in great hunks, to be picked out like coal, and three-fourths of every hunk belonged to Dick ! His agent was vexed at having so much responsibility thrust upon him, and absolutely declined to act any further. He reminded Dick that, as the largest shareholder, he had duties in proportion to his profits in the matter, and that it was unfair on his

associates to shirk them. At the same time he invited him to dinner, and promised to sit up all night, if requisite, and help him through his budget.

Visions of a restored and glorified Wadehurst flitted across his mind, and he reflected it would be well for him to be able to convince Mark Applejohn that he was seeking Stella for herself alone.

So about a quarter to eight he called a cab, and, as bad luck would have it, he had to pass along the Belgrave Road to his destination. There he was blocked. He paid his cabby, and tried to dodge through back streets around the fire on foot, but got caught in the crowd, and held prisoner.

The 'ugly rush,' which upset the packing-case on which Mrs. Mac was standing to view the fire came crosswise, sending

her into the street and her companions in the contrary direction, so that they found refuge and safety in the shop. But this world is full of compensations. In the stampede caused by the arrival in force of the police she escaped injury, as they came up from behind, where the mob was thickest. Here Dick got the worst of it. You can't go on breaking heads with a blackthorn stick for ever, especially when the blood is pouring down your own. There came a time when his strength failed him, and he could see nothing but green fiery stars dancing before his eyes, and when his only weapon fell from his hand. Then the wolves of London sprang on him, and dragged him into their midst, and carried him along with them with blows and kicks and cursing. He was a shining mark for them, poor fellow ! in the dress he wore ;

but I have a fond hope that he did not suffer alone. Indeed, there were several 'side shows,' when the police came up, in which one wolf was worrying another on account of misdirected kicks or blows.

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning when Mr. Grainger joined Macgruther in his study to report upon the patient's condition, and the catalogue of his injuries was a long one. Seven contused wounds of scalp, left arm and three ribs broken, right knee and hip badly hurt by kicks, incised wound on back of neck—not serious—little finger of right hand dislocated, and some minor ills.

'That is all I can find at present,' said the surgeon. 'I hope there is no internal mischief; but there may be, as he says he remembers that a big ruffian jumped on him when he was down.'

‘ He is conscious, then ?’

‘ Oh quite ; and recognised me.’

The manner of this recognition is so characteristic of Dick that it must be recorded.

When his clothes had been cut off him, and his arm set, and his head bandaged, and so on, being asked where he felt most pain, he looked up, and said :

‘ Holloa, Harry, old man ! is that you ? I’ve been hunting for you everywhere. This *is* lucky !’

‘ We shall want a nurse,’ Grainger told his host ; ‘ and if you like I’ll get one.’

‘ Use your own discretion, Mr. Grainger, in every respect. Lord Wadehurst has laid me under the deepest obligation by his gallant defence of my wife ; and there are other reasons why I desire that nothing shall be left undone for him whilst he is

under my roof. Order whatever you require. If you think you need assistance, send for anyone you like to select. I will be responsible. Do you stay here to-night ?

‘ I think so. If, when the servants are up, you will place one at my disposal for messages, I shall be obliged. Any news of Mrs. Macgruther ?’

‘ She is still very nervous and excited, and cannot sleep.’

‘ Can I do anything for her ?’

‘ I will ask.’

The result was that the surgeon went upstairs again, and found a patient who had not a word to say about herself, but was wild with anxiety about Dick. Would he die ? Where was he hurt ? How did he look ? What did he say ?

Grainger pacified her all he could, in

words, and produced out of a little black box, which he carried in his waistcoat-pocket, an enchanter's wand, commonly known as a hypodermic syringe, which had already changed Dick from a mass of aching flesh and bone—or, as he put it himself, 'one sore place'—into a happy spirit floating in the air amidst green fields and sparkling rivers ; able, with a wave of his hand, to rise above the mountain-tops, or to pass leagues and leagues over sun-lit seas.

Into some such paradise where blessed science can send the suffering, and fools trespass to their undoing, Mrs. Mac passed, and for awhile was at rest.

Dick woke up hot and restless ; by noon he was feverish ; by night he was raving. Two of the greatest surgeons living backed up Henry Grainger's treatment, and said

there was nothing to be done but to wait. He *might* pull through. And so passed many days.

Sam Crawford, who expected that he would come straight to him on his arrival in England, fidgeted in his office, and could not attend to his work. Patsey (mindful of her lord's first dismal coming home) provided lights and supper, and sat up for him night after night. Percy Stanring became a perfect nuisance at the telegraph and post office. Stella (who had dreaded his coming) conjured up horror after horror to account for his non-appearance, and watched and prayed for him to come.

For, you see, those who were waiting for him did not know what had happened; and those who knew what had happened did not know who were waiting for him.

And all this arose out of one mischosen word. Grainger asked him where he was *living*, to which he truthfully replied, 'Nowhere,' and began what Mr. Kipling calls 'another story,' which was stopped as too exciting. Had the young surgeon said 'staying,' he would have been told Cannon Street Hotel; and then Dick would have got clean shirts and things of his own, and the general public some news to talk about which had not been published. Macgruther did not want his wife's name to appear; the police got the 'tip,' and the reporters—nothing, beyond the naked fact that there had been 'an ugly rush' in which several persons had been robbed, and one gentleman severely hurt. When the case was at its worst, the Macgruthers cast about for relatives, and found the two sisters of the late lord, who had been given

the bulk of the Wadehurst property, and notified them of their nephew's condition. One was an old single lady, who lived with an old single servant in an old-fashioned lodging in Sloane Street, and could not be made to understand that she was rich ; the other was the Hon. Mrs. Harvey Gordon, wife of an important official in the Treasury, who had (apparently) registered an oath that she would never be poor. Being, both of them, 'Bogey's' seniors, they were well on in life, they both nourished a thoroughbred Birkett hatred of their deceased brother, and hadn't spoken to each other for twenty years.

The Hon. Mrs. Gordon presented her compliments to Mr. Macgruther, and whilst thanking him for his communication, was advised not to incur any responsibility with regard to a person with whom

(though a relation) she had no acquaintance whatever. But the old maid remembered Dick's father, and his beautiful mother, and the terrible scrape she had got herself into by helping them in their courtship, and her poor old lonely heart was touched.

‘I would like to go and see him,’ she told her ancient maid, ‘and take some jelly, if I could afford it. I would indeed, Sarah; but they might make me pay for doctors and the funeral, and I really couldn't afford it.’

‘You've got six thousand pounds a year,’ said Sarah, ‘and you don't spend four hundred. What's the good of talking about can't afford?’

Sarah was a bit of a tyrant, and had her own way in most things, always excepting the loosening of her mistress's purse-

strings; and in these she now helped to tie another knot.

For, having been persuaded to see Dick, the time came when old Miss Birkett sat by his bedside two hours every day watching his haggard but still handsome face, and thinking of old times—of the gallant soldier brother who had been her darling and her pride, and the dear friend who gave up title and riches to follow him to her death. And here was their only child, brought up in a school she knew, disinherited, poor (as she was told), suffering for his bravery, without one kindred hand to help him.

‘He shall have all my share of it back,’ she said to herself one day when he was pronounced out of danger, ‘when I die; and I’ll save up all I can. Sarah must not be so extravagant.’

And she went home in an omnibus.

By this time Dick had been able to give some account of himself. Sam Crawford was sent for, and the news forwarded by him to Fairlock. Stupendous news! The ostracized Lord Wadehurst had met with an accident, and was being nursed by Mrs. Mac, or, at any rate, in her house.

Very shortly afterwards this lady was called into her husband's study, and sat there for some moments—the most terror-stricken woman in all London.

‘My dear,’ he began, ‘you must prepare yourself for a great surprise. I had a long conversation with Lord Wadehurst yesterday, and I have made some inquiries this morning which lead me to think we have all done him a cruel injustice.’

‘I have heard that he denies——’ she

began, pulling herself together ; for the kindness of his tone reassured her.

‘He more than denies. He has given me proof that he had just started on a long sea-voyage when your poor sister was last seen in London, the morning of our marriage, the nineteenth, you know, of November; and that she went to Havre on the twenty-first of the next month. So they could not have gone away together.’

‘But they were seen together in Mexico.’

‘That he denies ; and there is a man expected every day from America who knows that he was in Denver alone at the very time in question. I do not know how credible this man may be, but the Home Office gives me a very bad character of Mr. Martin, upon whose evidence the trial was allowed to proceed. Indeed,

he has almost acknowledged that he perjured himself on that occasion. What I have yet to tell you is very sad. It will shock you greatly, but there is some comfort in it. Are you not glad that you need no longer blush for your poor sister's—memory ?'

'Her memory ! Is she——'

The word would not come. Macgruther bowed his head.

'She died at Havre on December 22, 1884—more than six years ago.'

'Did — *he* — find — all — this — out — himself?' faltered Mrs. Mac with dry lips.

'Some lucky chances helping him—yes. Mr. Grainger turns out to have been the surgeon who was on board the ship which took him out to Barbadoes, and an old schoolfellow. You were once very

bitter against your sister Frances. I would like to hear you say something——'

'I cannot!' she cried. 'It is all so sudden—so wildly strange. You don't give me time to think. Your law, your courts, your judges and your juries—things that you men understand and swear by—are, it seems, all wrong. Black is white, and night is day; and you expect a woman to take it in and understand it by word of command. I cannot understand it. You must make it clearer. You must tell me a great deal more—there *must* be more.'

'Nothing but matters of detail.'

'About what you have told me?'

'Yes. Those are the main facts.'

'Alex! for God's sake don't keep anything back! Why did she go away? *Why did he?* Did he tell you?'

‘We presume that poor Frances left her husband because she could no longer bear his conduct. Lord Wadehurst had a serious quarrel with his late uncle.’

‘Is that all?’ breathless with emotion.

‘My dear Bertha, you are exciting yourself unduly about trifles. There must certainly have been some other reason why he left so suddenly, but he declines to state it, and I do not think we have any right to insist upon a statement. It is enough for us if he can show that he went one way, and Frances another. And he gives me his word of honour that no improper word ever passed between them. There was—as you may guess—another woman in the case.’

Bertha had risen, and was pacing the room, with her hands pressed upon her temples. As her husband concluded, she

stopped by the window with her back to him, and began tapping nervously on the glass.

‘Will there be another trial?’ she asked in a low, husky voice.

‘That will depend upon your father.’

‘You have told him?’

‘Of course! He will be here at three o’clock with his solicitor to confer with Lord Wadehurst and Mr. Crawford.’

She gave a quick glance at the clock, and then resumed her seat.

‘If he’s well enough to talk business, surely I can see him, Alex. I long to thank him. May I see him, dear?’

‘I have no objection. He is sitting up. Ask Grainger. But the question is, are *you* fit for an interview which will recall such exciting recollections? You look as pale as death. This has been a great shock.’

‘Yes, dear,’ she replied, placing her hand on his. ‘I am trembling all over, and I shall not get over it till I *know*—till I realize that—— Don’t you understand? You’ve been going over it, and making inquiries in your own clever, cool-headed way, and of course you’re right; but it comes on me all at once. It bewilders me, Alex. If Di—if Wadehurst gives me his word of honour, it would quiet me. I should feel so happy! Please let me see him. Besides, I want to know more about poor Frances—my dear wronged sister! Oh, don’t look so stern!’

He pressed her hand tenderly, and his face softened.

‘I was not looking stern for you, my love,’ he told her. ‘You touched on a very painful subject—one into which you had better not inquire at present. If you

promise not to ask him anything about poor Frances beyond what I have told you, you can see him whenever he is ready to receive you. Send up and ask. Now I must go to the House. I'm late already.'

He kissed her on the forehead, as was his custom, and left her.

In her own pet room—a shrine untrodden save by the choicest of familiar spirits—she awaited Dick's answer. No other woman in all London had such a room. I am not thinking of furniture and hangings, and such-like, although these were of the richest, and chosen by one who was not afraid of colours and was a mistress of their melodies. It was full of treasures which could not be duplicated and money might not buy. R.A.'s had vied with each other (as a labour of love)

to decorate her doors. The tiger-skin before the fire was a royal gift. The walls were covered with original works of art, from pen-and-ink sketches of notables by notables, to the cream of the salons. Her tables and shelves were piled with curios of every description. She had a belt which once carried the sword of the greatest soldier of our time ; she had a sacred relic presented by a cardinal as a means towards her conversion ; she had the shoes in which lovely Maria Taglioni danced her last dance on the stage ; she had the glass from which an emperor had gallantly broken the stem after toasting her health. For a paper-weight on her writing-desk she used a plate in which the grandest race-horse that ever stood on iron won the Derby ; and on one of her window-panes was a sparkling couplet

composed to her honour, and written with a diamond in the hand of a queen !

Amidst this wealth of art, these splendid tributes to her popularity, this overwhelming evidence of the love and regard which she had gained from all sorts and conditions of men, she stood and groaned.

‘I am the most luckless woman on earth,’ she told herself. ‘All sick men are peevish. They can’t stand pain as we do. He’ (meaning Dick) ‘will not be himself. He’ll hate me the more now, because of all he has suffered for me ; and those lawyers will wring everything out of him, unnerved and shattered as he is. Why did I go to that wretched fire ? It seems as though I can do nothing right—absolutely nothing that does not plunge me deeper and deeper into trouble.’



CHAPTER III.

THE MIGHTY HUMBLD.

As Mrs. Mac entered the sick-room Dick's nurse placed a chair for her by his side, and retired. He was really looking better than usual, for the advent of his old love had brought some colour into his face ; but she recoiled, shocked at the wreck before her. All her prearranged greetings, all her rehearsed 'business,' were forgotten. She could only stand with clasped hands, and murmur, 'Oh Dick ! oh, Dick !'

He was sitting up in an invalid's chair,

his left arm in splints, his right hand tied up all but the thumb ; his head (from which all the hair had been cut) was a network of bandages, and his face stamped with the hall-marks of pain and weakness. His other hurts made him as helpless as an infant. He reclined where they placed him, and could not move his body an inch without help. Beside him was a small table with a spring-bell and a glass of lemonade. The former was in reach, the latter not. He touched the bell with his better hand, and, when the nurse answered the call, asked her to put the glass a little nearer. This done, they were alone again.

‘ Oh, Dick ! ’ said Bertha reproachfully and with tears in her eyes, ‘ I could have done that for you. Why didn’t you ask me ? ’

‘I have given you already too much trouble, Mrs. Macgruther,’ he replied.

‘Trouble! How can you *think* such a word, after all you have done and suffered for me?’

‘That’s over. Please don’t talk about it. It was all in the day’s work, and I should have done it for any woman.’

‘Yes,’ she told him, with bitterness in her tone, ‘and you are sorry it was not for some other woman.’

‘I am sorry that you were placed in need of my help, Mrs. Macgruther. You must have been horribly frightened. How is your ear?’

‘Nearly well, thank you. Mr. Grainger says there will only be a little white line when it is quite healed. But why will you call me “Mrs. Macgruther” when I call you “Dick” so often?’

‘ You gave me a lesson on that subject which I have not forgotten,’ he replied.

‘ Dick, you must forget that wretched day.’

‘ I cannot.’

‘ But you *have*—in part, at least. My husband has told me of your discovery, and it seems that you—oh, Dick! you know what I mean, you have not—you have been merciful, and spared me.’

‘ You said, on that day you wish me to forget, that I could not be a scoundrel. If I spared you then, how much more reason have I to do so now, after your husband’s great kindness to me?’

‘ Pshaw! you rescued his wife and some of her jewels.’

‘ He is rescuing me from a worse plight than you were ever in.’

‘ And I will help,’ she said, drawing

closer to him, and speaking in an undertone. ‘Try and put yourself in my place. You wanted me to explain that letter, and—and what led to it. That would have been utter ruin to me, and for what? You were brought up in the country, Dick; you never were in London society. You don’t know how hard it can be on a woman, and how soon it forgives a man. I had gained so high a position, and everything was at stake with society, and a much sterner judge—my husband. It seemed to me that you could do no good. People would have said exactly what I told you about poor Frances *then*. But you drove me to bay, and I struck foul blows. I admit it. Why, Dick, if a wounded man were cornered, with nothing but death before him, is he to blame for not fighting fair?’

‘It strikes me,’ said Dick, ‘that I was

the man in the corner, and that you forced me there. You began the war.'

'And I was wrong. I see that now. I could not have been friendly with you under the circumstances, but I might have left you alone. I wish I had done so.'

'Amen to that!' said Dick.

'If you only knew what misery I have gone through, you would pity me. This morning, when my husband sent for me, I felt like a condemned murderess summoned for execution. It was only when he spoke kindly that I began to hope that you—that you——'

'Had not found my way to be a scoundrel?'

'Oh, don't! *don't!* Be merciful to me, Dick, as you are honourable and brave. Forgive me for the sake of the old days. Remember that once you loved me.'

‘Hush!’ he cried sternly; ‘not a word of that. The thing you killed is buried too deep for thought to reach it. You may realize how thoroughly you did your work, when I tell you that I spared you at first for the sake of the man who bought you.’

She uttered a low cry, and hid her face in her hands.

‘I knew him then only by reputation. I know him better now. He shall not suffer for you.’

She fell on her knees beside his chair, and tried to sob her thanks.

This was the man she had *defied*! This was the man she had tried to cover with the vilest shame!

‘I cannot help you to rise,’ he said more kindly. ‘Please get up and dry your eyes. This affair can be settled, I hope and

think, without your name being mentioned. It will be enough for me to say that letter did not refer to your poor sister. I shall not—unless driven to the last extremity—disclose to whom it did refer.'

'If such a soul as yours can know its own greatness,' she said, turning up her tear-stained face, 'pity me again, for I have lost you.'

Not another word was spoken for some minutes. She was now sitting by his side, crying quietly. His thoughts were far away. He saw the face of the girl who had won the better love of his manhood, and his eyes grew dim and softened. The woman at his feet looked up, and thought that the changed expression was for her. She had moved him at last. She furtively raised the hem of the loose dressing-gown

which had been thrown round his shoulders, and kissed it.

‘I promised,’ she said, breaking the silence, ‘that I would not ask you about my poor sister’s death. Macgruther thought it might be too exciting for me. But, you see, I am quite composed now. Will you tell me—all?’

‘No ; not until your husband gives you back that promise.’

‘You are always thinking of my husband,’ she replied pettishly.

‘You have good reason to be thankful that I do.’

Then she saw her mistake. The softened look was not for her. She had not touched any chord of his heart.

‘Well,’ she said, rising, and trying her best to force a smile, ‘let us talk of something pleasant.’

‘I am afraid we have not much time for that, even if we could find a subject. Lord Strathfolia will be here at three.’

‘Yes ; and he’ll talk, but you’ll get no decision out of him till he has seen mamma. You had better have sent for her. She has all the brains in the family.’

‘You have changed your opinion,’ said Dick dryly. ‘I remember when you used to say that she was no match for you, and I think you proved it once or twice.’

‘We certainly haven’t found a pleasant subject yet,’ she replied, ‘and we’ve only ten minutes left. What are your plans? Shall you go back to Wadehurst? Or will you take my old advice—let the house, go back to America, marry a rich wife, and come home in a blaze of triumph?’

‘I think I may possibly go back to

America, Mrs. Macgruther, but I doubt if I shall find a wife there.'

'Oh yes, you will,' she said, not perceiving the evasion, 'lots of them—I mean lots of girls to choose from. They rise at a title like a trout to a May-fly. Besides, don't you know, Dick, that you are much handsomer now than you were when—when you were a boy?'

'My glass tells me that I look like a scarecrow.'

'I mean when you're well. It will all come back again, and you will be as you were that night when you stood over me so strong and beautiful, before the horrid blood poured down your poor brave face. Oh, Dick, I shall never forget it—never!'

'I wish to goodness you'd try,' said this unromantic patient; 'the thing's over and done with. It isn't a bit of good talking

about it. Grainger says I can be moved in a week, and then you won't have anything to remind you.'

'That is most unkind—almost brutal; but I forgive you. You're not yourself yet. Do you think you are quite up to this conference? Lawyers are so tiresome, and your poor head——'

'You need not be under the slightest apprehension about that. My head is as clear as it ever will be, and the lawyers will get exactly what I intend to give them, and no more. I am a Birkett, Mrs. Macgruther, and inherit the family obstinacy. *That* is strictly entailed.'

'I wish everything else had been. I think that wretched old man acted infamously.'

'He is dead.'

'Lots of men die hating their heirs, but

they don't disinherit them, for the sake of their house. If a man carries his spite into the grave with him, and plants it there to grow, it's no excuse to say, "he's dead." That's bad morality, Dick.'

'A wise man wrote, "Say nothing but good about the dead."'

'Yes, and a wiser one trumped him. The good one does is often buried with you, but the bad lives. And that is right. I dare say old Wadehurst chuckled over his wicked will, and thought, "I can have the satisfaction of being cruel as long as I live, and when I die they mustn't say anything but good of me." Is that fair?'

Dick smiled for the first time during the interview.

'I was not aware that you had turned moralist,' he said.

'Because you don't know me,' she re-

plied eagerly. 'With the exception of this one thing, which I so deeply deplore, and would do all that I can to atone for, I have not been a bad woman. I am respected wherever I go. I have done some good—unselfishly; and many poor people love me. Amongst my own class I am treated with the utmost deference, and this is why your words and manner sting me to the quick. Why, I would not speak to some unfortunate, half redeemed from the streets, as you have spoken to me!'

This touched him. Her words rang true; and in justice let me add that there was no sham in her former appeals. She had come to play a part—to coax and wheedle, and (if the opportunity offered) to lie; but the sight of him purged these wiles away, and left her truthful. It

seemed to him like high treason against the brown-eyed queen of his manhood, to listen with patience to this woman's reminder of his calf-love for her, or to answer her lament that she had lost him. But this last piteous appeal created no discord. Her proud head was bowed, her eyes were dry, her face quivered with suppressed pain. Her sin was great, but so also was her humiliation—and she was a woman!

‘This kick on the head I got the other night,’ he replied, ‘won’t heal up all at once. It will in time, I dare say. Let us leave other things for Time to heal, Mrs. Macgruther. They are sore just now, and if they made me unduly harsh, I am sorry.’

‘Oh, God bless you, Dick! May I come again to-morrow?’

‘If you like; but “let the dead past bury its dead.”’

She returned to her boudoir, and found the journals of that day which she patronized laid out, aired, and cut for her perusal. Listlessly she turned over the pages of one which does not like to be called a ‘society paper,’ but devotes a page once a week to the furniture and family surroundings of celebrated persons.

The ‘Celebrity at Home’ in this number was ‘THE RIGHT HON. ALEXANDER MACGRUTHER IN COMMONWEALTH GARDENS.’

Mrs. Mac got as far as the heading, and then threw the paper from her with an impatient ‘Pshaw!’ It fell on the rug, and she (unconsciously perhaps) set her foot upon it.

Had she read, she would have found this concluding paragraph :

‘ He will frankly own that much of his success in life is due to his beautiful wife. This lady (known to the more fortunate of her friends as “ Mrs. Mac ”) is a power in the world of fashion, and she has gained this position, not by any extraneous aid, but by her matchless tact, her goodness of heart, and the irreproachable life she has led.’





CHAPTER IV.

A TREATY OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP.

THE conference which followed was attended by Lord Strathfolia and his solicitor, by Sam Crawford (acting for Dick), by Mr. Grainger the surgeon, and by Amos P. Hankin, a citizen of Denver, in the State of Colorado and United States of America. The lawyers agreed afterwards that Sir Charles Russell himself could not have stated the case more clearly than did our Dick. He produced the papers he had obtained at Dieppe ; he asked Grainger to state where they were

together at one o'clock on November 19, 1884 ; and Hankin showed that he (Dick) was in Denver for a month on each side of the date when he was supposed to be in Mexico. Lord Strathfolia's solicitor suggested that it would be highly satisfactory if Dick would explain the letter he had written to Frank Birkett, and his noble client backed him up with a 'Yes, yes—that is indispensable.' Whereupon Dick sat on them both. He could be haughty when he pleased, and he was so now.

'You have my word of honour,' he said, 'respecting my relations with the late Lady Gault. That *should* cover the subject just broached. If it be not considered to do so, then I desire that this conference should end.'

The man of law looked glum, and the Earl murmured :

‘ Yes, yes ; of course it does.’

Sam Crawford’s opinion as to the impossibility of reopening the divorce case was confirmed. The principals were both dead—no damages or costs had been decreed against the co-respondent. Faith had to be kept with the rascal Martin. What, then, was to be done ? With the assistance of long-headed Macgruther, on his return from the House, the following plan of campaign was agreed upon :

A short obituary notice of Frances Lady Gault, giving the date and place of her death—but not entering into its painful details — was to be published in the ‘ society ’ papers. If this provoked discussion, all the better. As soon as Dick was well enough to travel, he should go to Fairlock as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Macgruther, and Lord and Lady Strath-

folia, with their last unmarried daughter, should be invited to meet him. Thus would the great world be given to understand that the persons most affected by Dick's (supposed) guilt were satisfied of his innocence.

This scheme met with Mrs. Mac's entire approval, and she took steps of her own to prepare the ground for its fructuation. She sent for Mr. Barbour, told him (with tears) of the horrible wrong that had been done her poor dear sister, and supplied him (for distribution in Hopshire) with a quantity of the journals containing the aforesaid obituary notice.

'This, you see,' she added as a 'by-the-bye,' 'exonerates Lord Wadehurst. I have always liked him, and he is coming to spend Easter with us at Fairlock.'

She gave him an excellent luncheon in

compensation for the leek the poor man would have to eat at home ; took him out in the carriage with her afterwards, shopping ; bought presents for his wife and daughter ; and dismissed him smiling with a five-pound note for his travelling expenses, which were usually eleven and sixpence.

‘ Now, by my halidom ! ’ he might have exclaimed, as the train took him back, ‘ the war goes bravely on ! ’

He might have a leek or two to swallow, but there was that in prospect which would take the taste out of his mouth. Old Mr. Stacey was very low. Langley—with its six hundred a year—would soon be vacant. Dick would be rehabilitated at Wood End, marry Stella, and, with old Applejohn’s money, revive all the past glories of Wadehurst !

Most assuredly would he make things as pleasant as possible for Dick ; and if he found his wife in the same frame of mind about him as in their last conversation on the subject, she would help. He sighed at that small word 'if,' for he feared, out of long experience, that, when he went one way, she was pretty sure to go in the contrary direction. Having taken his cue from Mrs. Mac, and making the most of Lady Gault's part of the case, he was informed that no one but an idiot would ever have condemned Dick Birkett, and that she (Mrs. Barbour) had never believed a word against him. With the exception of this astounding feat in 'craw-fishing,' all went well, and they trotted along peacefully in their double harness towards the ends they had both in view.

During the days which elapsed between the reception of the telegram and the news of Dick's accident, Stella's heart was sore. Her hero was vindicated; he had come back 'with honour,' but not to her. Then she knew the hand of Death had been upon him, and that a woman for whom she had an instinctive dislike and distrust was (as she supposed) nursing him tenderly. Next, she was told, and saw for herself, that a swarm of workmen had descended on Wadehurst House. The gardens were being put in order; the drive picked up and regravelled; the iron gates painted; the fallen out-houses restored; the stables pulled down to be rebuilt; and men from London had been measuring floors and halls and passages.

Our old friend Colonel Daly was, of course, the first to spy this out, and buzzed

round with the information. He happened to know that Wadehurst had been let, and the new tenant was going to spend 'twen-ty thou-sand pounds upon repairs and decoration !'

'Who is he ?' asked Mark Applejohn.

'I can tell *you*,' whispered the Colonel confidentially (and this was his seventh confidence) : 'he is a rich American named Hankin. I had it from Sutton, who has the contract for rebuilding the stables. Hope the fellow will be presentable !'

Here I may say that not even to his faithful Sam Crawford had Dick breathed a word about the silver-mine ; and the gentleman from Denver had sworn a big oath not to tell. Stella was to be the first to know. So a conspiracy was formed under which the orders for the works at Wadehurst came from Amos P. Hankin,

accompanied, as he was a stranger, by liberal payment in advance.

‘I wonder,’ continued old Daly, ‘that our unfortunate young friend did not let the place at first. That was a ridiculous fad—coming down and living in two rooms. He ought to get at least a thousand a year for it.’

‘That’s something,’ said Applejohn, rattling the half-crowns in his pockets.

‘Well, I should say so! Considering that he never had more than six hundred a year, and admits having lost half his capital in America.’

Mark Applejohn walked home in the grumps. Dick had come back ‘in honour,’ and he knew what must follow.

‘Why the dickens,’ he mused, ‘was he’ (Dick) ‘in such a hurry? Why didn’t he give *me* a chance? I’d a spent fifty thou-

sand on the place, and bin glad to see my dear live there like a lady. It's his —— pride !'

When he told his news, Stella turned deadly pale. Had Dick forgotten ? Had that woman (meaning Mrs. Mac) turned him against her, so that he was going to cut himself adrift from his old home—and from her ? He was coming on a visit to his grand new friends, and they would monopolize him. She was as good a little girl as you can find anywhere, but this I must admit—she hated Mrs. Mac.

Whilst these things were going on in Hopshire, Dick was recovering strength and his old good looks in London ; and one day old Miss Birkett, summoning up all her courage, offered to pay his doctor's bill, rejoicing with all her heart that the undertaker was not 'in it.'

Dick laughed.

‘Don’t you fret about that, auntie,’ he said. ‘Grainger and I understand each other. He is a very old friend.’

She loved him to call her ‘auntie’—the poor old lonely lady! and once or twice this idea dawned upon her:

‘Why wait till I die? Why not *see* him with what should have been his own for a little time?’

Mrs. Mac repeated her visit to the sick-room, and was most gracious to ‘auntie.’ Gradually she gave Dick more and more of her company, and cautiously became more and more friendly. She read to him, played and sung for him when he was able to come down into the drawing-room, and drove with him in the park later on. He—generous in his belief that she had suffered and repented, grateful

for her many acts of kindness, and almost completely happy—let the grass and the flowers grow upon the grave of the dead past till it took but a vague form in his memory. She began to know him. The dashing, daring boy who loved her so passionately in her girlhood (as she once thought) had passed out of her life. Here—dependent upon her care, and gaining health and strength under it—was a man the very type and essence of what manhood was in her imagination—chivalrous, simple, masterful, unselfish.

She had nursed her husband through a severe illness, and found him (as many men are) peevish and unreasonable. How different was Dick ! He had a smile and a kind word for every little service, and turned off a groan into a joke.

Woe to the woman who begins to

compare another man with her husband, to his detriment !

The horrors of that night when the wolves of London were baiting her, and the glory of her deliverance, became a fixed picture in her mind. She saw him, her champion, standing over her—so handsome, so dauntless, and so tender ! What would her purchased lord have done ? Made a speech, shouted ‘Police !’ tried to escape—anything but stand at bay and fight. This was unjust, but into such comparisons injustice is sure to come.

She allowed herself to think what might have been — saddest of words of tongue or pen, and in this connection the most perilous. Suppose she had kept her word, and ran away with her first love that night ? The trouble would have blown over in time. She would sooner or later

have been Lady Wadehurst, for poor Frank was doomed to an early death, and the old lord would have forgiven them in time. With Dick in the House of Lords, she could have made a higher social position than that which she now held, and, oh! the difference in her home, and to her heart!

So for her the grave of the dead past opened, and her self-slaughtered love came forth like a vampire. It lay on her breast at night, and with insatiate lips drew from her all the consolation her worldly wisdom had supplied — riches, station, power! What were they, compared to one caress from the man she had betrayed? Husband! By this time she loathed the remembrance that she had been Macgruther's wife. Children! Ah! yes; these were very dear to her, but

how much dearer would they be if they sat on Dick's knee and called *him* father! Honour! What had a woman who had sold herself for money to do with honour?

She never returned to her scheme for marrying the (supposed) pauper peer to a rich American heiress. She dreaded his visit to Fairlock, and postponed it as long as she could. There, with a house full of guests, she would lose what had become constant and uninterrupted companionship with him. Besides, other women would be around him. She knew nothing about a pair of sweet brown eyes that were getting sadder every day, or of the yearning of an honest heart to brighten them.

Macgruther fell under the spell, and warmed (as far as his nature would allow) to Dick.

‘We must see,’ he told his wife one day, ‘if we cannot get him a colonial government in which he can save a little money. He has been badly treated throughout, and I like him.’

‘That is a great deal for you to say,’ Mrs. Mac replied; ‘I am glad to hear it. But I would not banish him to a colony, if I were you,’ she added carelessly, and turned away to hide the beating of her heart.

‘Well, I’ll see Drayton about it. Perhaps we can find something for him at home. When do we go to Fairlock?’

‘On Saturday week—if that will suit you.’

‘Perfectly, so far as I am concerned; but why delay so long? This is wretched weather in town! Why not go down—you and the children and Wadehurst—at once. You are not looking well, and the change

may do you good.' Kindly he placed his hand on her shoulder as he spoke, and at his touch a shudder ran through her.

'I am quite well, thank you,' she replied coldly, 'and have engagements here. It will be the Saturday before Easter.'

This was bad news for Dick. Patient with bruises and broken bones, there was one thing about which he was impatient as a man can be. He could walk about now with his broken arm in a sling, and grudged every hour that kept him from Wood End. Well, he had to submit. Going back—in state as it were—to Fairlock with the Macgruthers and the Strathfolias was a horrible bore, but it had to be endured as the first step towards Stella.

Mrs. Mac and Dick breakfasted together late, and the lady read her morning letters at the table.

‘Why, Dick!’ she exclaimed soon after the above-recorded conversation, ‘Barbour writes that you have let Wadehurst!’

‘You told me to,’ he replied somewhat dryly.

‘Yes; but you might have let me know that you had followed my advice. I hope the new tenant is not some horrid *nouveau riche*.’

‘*Nouveau riche* he is, but I don’t know about the horrid part of it; yet——’

‘I’m sorry,’ she said, laying down Mr. Barbour’s letter. ‘Oh, Dick! if things had gone right, and’ (quickly) ‘we had you as a neighbour!’

‘The new man will keep up the old place as it ought to be kept.’

‘I hate new men. Where does he come from?’

‘America.’

‘ I thought so. I hate Yankees !’

‘ My dear Mrs. Mac ! all Americans are not Yankees. What would you say if an American spoke of a Yorkshireman as a “ Cockney,” or of a Welshman as a “ Pat ” ?’

‘ I think you might have told me yourself,’ she said, coming back to the charge. ‘ I suppose this comes of your close confabs with that Mr. Hankin ?’

‘ It does, indeed !’

‘ Barbour says ’ (with a glance at the half-read letter) ‘ that he is your tenant.’

‘ Mr. Barbour is wrong, as usual. Hankin is only an agent.’

‘ Acting for—— ?’

‘ His principal.’

‘ You are very provoking ! Why cannot you say who has taken Wadehurst ?’

‘ Because, at present, he does not wish

his name to be known. I hope, with all my heart, that his present plans may go through; but there is just a possibility that he may have to change his arrangements.'

'Well, I hope, for your sake, he will not. You must take some nice chambers in London, Dick, and I'll see that you have plenty of amusement. You used to be a good dancer. Have you forgotten how to waltz?'

'I don't know; I haven't tried for years.'

'Promise that we shall have the next together.'

Dick rose with a laugh.

'That would be rash,' he said. 'If all doesn't go right about Wadehurst, I shall return at once to the States, and then you could never dance with me again.'



CHAPTER V.

DICK IS AFRAID.

THE great world was much exercised over the obituary notice of Lady Gault, and the correspondence which it was intended to provoke. There was a dash of *fin de siècle* cynicism in some of its deliverances ; but upon the whole it was just to the dead and fair to the living. In West Hopshire the Rev. Mr. Barbour did his allotted work well. He distributed with a lavish hand the most favourable literature on the subject which every post brought him from Mrs. Mac ; and he preached a really good

sermon against hasty judgments, and the false pride which sometimes prevented dearly-beloved brethren from owning that they had made a mistake. So when Saturday came, a numerous and representative assembly of neighbours welcomed the Macgruthers and their guest at the railway-station; and Colonel Daly (self-elected chairman) made a little speech, highly flattering to Dick, for which Lord Strathfolia thanked him. Dick, hating all such fussing, ran away and hid himself in the lamp-room.

On their way home a curious thing happened. Dick—as an invalid yet—went in a close carriage with Mrs. Mac and the boys. Dick had cast eager glances down the lane leading to Wood End, and lived in hopes of seeing a brown skirt flutter somewhere in the road. So he was silent.

Mrs. Mac leaned back in her corner thinking of the happy hours, sin-poisoned, which had passed, and was silent too. As they passed over the bridge leading to the Manor House, Dick looked up and saw that she had fainted. This happened at the exact spot where he once had, for a moment, lost his senses, and where the regenerate King Pippin had afterwards misconducted himself.

‘Sir James was right,’ she said, when the seizure had passed. ‘That water breeds malaria. And see how high it is!’

It was part of the programme that Dick should go to church with ‘the family’; and by arrangement with the Rector Mrs. Mac managed that they should be both a little late. So my Lord Wadehurst, with Lady Strathfolia by his side, marched up the aisle

in full view of a large congregation. Dick found it not large enough by one as he passed the Rectory pew.

‘She might have come,’ he thought, and then began to worry : she might be ill ; they might have taken her away ; and so on.

Now, Wood End was in Wadehurst parish, and at this moment Stella was attending to the prospects held out to the wicked man who might turn away from his wickedness in the church of her adoption.

On Monday Mrs. Mac’s Easter visitors arrived, and Dick went ‘on business’ to the house of his fathers. He was driven there in a cosy circular brougham drawn by a pair of breedy bays capable of making good time on the Hopshire roads in any sort of weather. This equipage had been

standing at Joe Pedley's for more than a week, and was supposed to be the property of Mr. Amos P. Hankin, who had placed it at the disposal of Lord Wadehurst during his (the owner's) unavoidable absence.

From another direction Mark Applejohn was stumping along towards the same bourne, for he had received this letter :

‘ MY DEAR MR. APPLEJOHN,

‘ Will you favour me with a conversation on a subject which I hope has ceased to be a painful one, and forget—as I have long since forgotten—a misunderstanding which tended to make it so? As I feel some difficulty about calling at Wood End just at present, would you mind calling at my old house on Monday about

noon? If this be not convenient, please let me know when and where we can meet.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘WADEHURST.’

‘It’s all over,’ said Mark with a gulp, as he showed this to mother. ‘We’ve lost our dear!’

Dick found his two rooms in an abject state of cleanliness and order, and had a long half-hour with triumphant Patsey before his visitor appeared.

After a somewhat shy greeting on both sides, Dick began :

‘Of course you know, Mr. Applejohn, that I have satisfied Lady Gault’s family of her innocence, and consequently stand clear myself; but this is not binding on you. Will you be good enough to read these papers and judge for yourself?’

So saying, he spread out, in their proper order, all the documents we know of, including the sworn statements of Amos P. Hankin and Henry Grainger, and, lighting a cigar, left Mark to read them.

‘If there is anything you wish me to explain,’ he added, as he turned aside, ‘ask it.’

‘It reads like a book,’ said Applejohn when he had finished.

‘Is that “dirt” you spoke of when we last met wiped away?’

‘Seems to me there never was no dirt,’ replied Mark, rubbing his chin. ‘Seems to me that everyone has made an ass of hisself—all but you.’

‘Now, let me say that I had never the slightest intention of striking you, and if involuntarily I gave you that idea, I sincerely regret it.’

‘Oh, that’s all right.’

‘Another thing. It may have occurred to you (and I think it has) that I was—that I am seeking Stel—Miss Barbour, actuated by other motives than the deep affection I have for her. If I am so fortunate as to win her for my wife, she shall not take one shilling of your money.’

‘I can do what I please with my money,’ replied Applejohn stoutly. ‘And you ain’t got no right—you haven’t got any right—to order her about, and say what she shan’t do.’

‘Well’ (and Dick smiled at his earnestness), ‘perhaps I put it too strong. What I mean is this: I love her for herself alone.’

‘You can’t live on love. You’ve got to think if you can give her as good a home as you want to take her from.’

‘Mr. Applejohn, I give you my word of

honour that I will not ask her to be my wife until I—I mean, unless I can do so.'

Old Mark had come prepared to give in, but not without having his growl.

'That's all very fine,' he replied; 'but we're simple folks, we are. Lords and ladies can't live as we does—we do.'

With this shot he walked to the window and looked out on the lawn and gardens, upon which a score of labourers were at work.

'That tenant of yours is going it!' he observed.

'Six years of neglect have played havoc with the place,' replied Dick.

'They tell me he's going to pay a thousand a year rent?'

'That is about what it is worth.'

'And spend twenty thousand. He should have a long lease for that.'

‘The lease is for my life.’

Applejohn growled a bad word.

‘You might as well have sold it.’

‘I could not ; there is the entail. Now, my dear Mr. Applejohn, may I go back with you to Wood End and—and make my peace there ?’

‘On one condition.’

‘Name it.’

‘That you put your’ (the next word was going to begin with a big, big D, but he swallowed it)—‘your pride in your pocket, and take what’s good for you.’

‘I will take what is good for me,’ Dick promised meekly.

‘It’s a pity !’ Mark said, going again to the window—‘*such* a pity ! Why couldn’t you have given me a chance ?’

‘I do not quite understand you.’

‘Why did you let this other fellow cut

me out of all this ?' (waving his hand over the reparations in sight). 'I've made lots of money, and saved it; and what I've saved is making more for itself. If you knew it, I could have spent forty thousand and not missed it; and then I could have seen my little gal Lady Wadehurst of Wadehurst, living where she's a right to.' (He stamped with vexation.) 'It's a sin and a shame, and all because of your' (it came out pat this time) '—— pride! What are you grinning at?'

'Excuse me. I was thinking that you are counting your Lady Wadehurst before she is—— Well, the rest of the old saying will not do, but you know what I mean.'

'I know what you *say*. You don't mean to tell me you're afraid of Stella?'

'Horribly afraid.'

Mark Applejohn thrust his hands into his pockets, rattled his silver, and chuckled.

‘You see,’ Dick continued, ‘I have known her all her life, and as a child I believe she loved me. In my troubles she was just and generous. That is in her nature.’

‘Right you are.’

‘It seems to me that I should have a better chance if I had not won her childish affections.’

Applejohn laughed aloud.

‘The gal’s been sick and worried,’ he said. ‘Don’t you go worrying her any more. None of your beating about the bush, no la-di-dah business. You just catch on and kiss her right in the mouth, and you’ll see what’s what.’

‘She would never speak to me again,’

said Dick, with a sigh. 'Let me drive you back, Mr. Applejohn ; it looks like rain.'

'We've had nothing else for the last week and more. Do you know that the Spark is over its banks two rods where you saw me catch those—those trout ? The roads are beastly.'

'So I perceive' (*test*, a pair of very muddy boots). 'I should have sent for you. Shall we start ?'

As they passed into the highroad they met the Fairlock curate on King Pippin, and Dick stopped to greet him.

'Holloa ! You're going to get a ducking, Percy.'

'Perhaps, but I can't help it.'

'Where are you going ?'

'To visit Mrs. Rawlins.'

'The deuce you are ! That old wretch ?'

‘She is dying, Dick. Crawford has given her up, and she has sent for me. Are you bound for Wood End?’

‘Yes. Wish me luck, dear old Percy!’

‘Joy go with you,’ was his reply, and *he* knew that joy was on its way.

‘He doesn’t deserve to get wet, in his state of health,’ said Dick, as they drove on, ‘for a hardened old sinner like that.’

‘What’s the matter with her?’ asked Mark.

‘I don’t know; she’s dying.’

‘But what has she done bad?’

‘She started as a herbalist, and went about to fairs telling fortunes, cheating poor servant girls, and worse things than that. She had a narrow squeak for her neck once at Maidstone Assizes about one of her *cures*. Just before I left, there was a very pretty little girl staying with her,

whom she passed off as her niece, and, if what is said be true, she sold and delivered her to Sir Claude Gault. Later on an Italian fellow in a circus married her, and ran away with her money in a week.'

'Serves her right.'

'And now she is sorry—sorry that she is going to die.'

'That ain't right,' objected Applejohn. 'How do you know it's not repentance?'

'Thank you for correcting me. I spoke too lightly,' said Dick. 'She is in good hands; and now I think of it, poor Percy is sure of a bath, for she lives in the valley below Fairlock, and as the Spark is out of its banks at Wadehurst, there must be flooding all round her.'

'You seem to like the young parson.'

'Like him! "Like" doesn't fill the bill

(as we say at Denver). He and Sam Crawford are the warmest friends I have.'

'And you lent him my old horse?'

'I did.'

'My old horse,' said Applejohn dryly, 'knows his way to Wood End blindfold.'

Dick blushed like a girl.

'He is quite quiet now, and up to your weight. Why not let him stay there.'

'D'ye mean it?' (quickly).

'Certainly, when I say so.'

'What'll you take for him?'

'Nothing but "thank you."'

'Well, that is mighty liberal. I shan't lose nothing by him, after all—or you either, Lord Wadehurst.'

'Couldn't you manage to call me "Dick"?' (the insinuating rascal!)

'Maybe—in time,' said Mark, rubbing his chin reflectively. 'If I was to hear

mother and our dear calling you “ Dick,” I might pick it up—Poll-parrot like ; but it seems like a let-down just now. Here we are, and just in time. It’s going to rain like blazes !’





CHAPTER VI.

BACK WITH HONOUR.

BRIGHT and early this morning came Nellie Barbour (driven by her intended in his dog-cart) with confirmation of the great news. Yes, it was all true. Lord Wadehurst was staying at the Manor House, had gone to church in a Manor House carriage, and sat in the Manor House pew, next to Lady Strathfolia, who found 'his places' for him, as he could not use his left hand! Then, of course, the sisters flitted upstairs to Stella's room for a long talk.

‘He’s not looking as brown as he did when he first came back, and I think he’s a little thinner, and he looks grave,’ Nellie reported.

‘One generally does look grave in church, dear.’

‘Yes; but he had a far-off look in his eyes. I am sure he didn’t attend to a word of papa’s sermon.’

‘Or you, either, if you were watching him all the time’ (with a twinge of jealousy).

‘Oh, I’ve heard it before, and I dare say he was thinking of his troubles. What a pity it is he should be so poor!’

‘He has let Wadehurst for a thousand a year,’ said Stella.

‘That’s nothing for an Earl, my dear’ (Miss Nellie was a nice little girl, but apt to give herself airs as a bride-elect). ‘Why,

Charley and I will have almost as much when we marry.'

'When is it to be?' asked Stella, glad to give the conversation a turn.

'I don't know. There's trouble about my trousseau. Papa never has any money. It all depends upon whether he gets Langley, and I heard him tell mamma he was afraid it is sold. Mr. Stacey is so old and ill that it is worth a lot of money.' These were parsons' daughters, and had learned all about advowsons and next presentations. 'So,' Nellie added with a sigh, 'we have to wait. I shall never forget your kindness, darling, about my beautiful ball-dress. I caught Charley in it.'

'I don't suppose he even noticed what you wore.'

'Ah, but others did! He is shy and slow—that is, he *was*. It made him so

horribly jealous. I think he would have murdered somebody if I had not taken pity on him.'

Downstairs, young Smallpage and Mark Applejohn talked *flood*, like many others at this time, for it was becoming serious, and all because of that (variously designated) weir at Fairlock Manor. Charley knew all about it, having been one of a deputation which had called on Mr. Macgruther's bailiff on the subject. It wasn't Macgruther's fault, as he was bound by the terms of his lease not to interfere in any way with the waterworks, and Mrs. Spaulding's agent was in a similar position. His instructions were to have them kept in perfect order, and to allow no alterations. And they were in perfect order for the work they were intended to do, but the rainfall was unprecedented, and

the recent reclamation of some hundred acres of Chart land, and its consequent drainage, was throwing more water into the little Spark than it had ever carried before.

‘We’ve telegraphed to Mrs. Spaulding,’ said Charley, ‘and told her that something *must* be done. We’re not going to be drowned out for any fad of hers.’

There is a good deal of old-fashioned Conservatism in Hopshire which did not like having one of its finest properties under the control of ‘a pair of servants,’ and there was talk of cutting the dam whether they liked it or no.

All this Charley told at some length, Mark fidgeting most of the time for fear he should be late for his appointment with Dick.

At last the lovers took their departure,

and Stella returned to her room. She saw her 'dear old dear' sally forth in a hurry, and wondered where he was going in such bad weather. She got out socks and slippers, and a change of clothes, and hung them before the fire in his room, to be ready for him when he came back wet; for all the valeting he tolerated was done by these loving hands. Then she curled herself up in her own window-seat (dormouse fashion) and tried to read, but could only fret. She went down to mother, and tried to be useful, but mother was in a very odd mood. She did not seem to want her help. It was always, 'Never mind that, love,' or, 'I'll attend to this, dearie,' and she was constantly urged to go and change her dress.

'Put on your brown tailor gown,' said mother; 'it's warm, and fits you so nicely.'

Now, this garment was quite suitable to the weather, but what matter how it fitted when there was no one to see? Nevertheless, she did as she was told, and curled up once more in the window-seat.

The skies darkened, big drops of rain blundered on the panes. 'Oh, what a wetting he will get,' she thought, 'with his poor rheumatic knee!'

Just then a strange carriage dashed up, a sash was lowered, and out came about half the object of her pity, struggling with the door handle, which he did not understand.

She ran downstairs, grabbed an umbrella and a mackintosh, threw open the front door, and was poised for a rush down the garden-path, when she saw the whole of another person, and he might have been a mad wolf, to judge by the manner in which she scattered her burdens and fled.

She found mother, and gasped :

‘ He has come—Di—Lord Wadehurst !’

‘ Well, my love,’ mother replied, with provoking calmness, ‘ go to the drawing-room and receive him ; *I’m* not dressed for company, and father has to change his things.’

‘ They got in before the rain, and as father brought him, he ought to entertain him.’

‘ My dear, father walked to Wadehurst, and his poor feet must be dreadfully wet. It would be very rude to keep Lord Wadehurst waiting.’

‘ Will you come soon—very soon ?’

‘ As soon as I can. Now go, like a good child.’

She had yearned, and waited, and watched for this coming, and now she wanted to run away and *think* about it. It was so sudden !

She stood with the door-handle in her hand, and her heart in her mouth. He must have heard the lock rattle, for he opened the door himself, and they were face to face, and hand in hand.

‘Won’t you sit near the fire?’ were her first words; ‘you must be very cold.’

‘Thank you,’ he said: ‘won’t you?’

‘Oh, I’ve been in the house all day. I’ll sit here.’ And she placed a chair six yards from him.

A pause.

‘Is your arm getting well?’

‘Rapidly. I can move the fingers.’ And he drummed some of them feebly against the long splint.

‘Mrs. Applejohn was busy in the store-room when you arrived, and begs to be excused. She will be here directly,’ said Stella.

Dick thought, 'I hope not ;' Stella prayed for anything to gain time.

'Do you remember the day we met last on Thorley Chart ?'

This was getting on dangerous ground, but she shirked it.

'Wasn't it cold ?' she asked, and shivered.

'Come nearer the fire—please do.'

'The shiver comes from memory. I'm quite warm here, thank you.'

'Stella,' said Dick, plunging, 'I have come back with honour.'

'Yes ; and I'm *so* glad. Now, you must tell me all about it—everything' ('If I can only get him into a long story, I'm safe—for to-day,' mused this little wretch) —'all about your travels. Now begin.'

'I'm not a good hand at that sort of thing.'

‘Oh yes, you are. You used to tell me all sorts of beautiful tales—all out of your own head. And now you have got facts. Fancy that I am Dormouse again—you know I was exacting about particulars—and tell me all.’

‘May I tell it as though it were a fairy tale?’ he asked, and his eyes brightened.

‘That will be capital,’ with a glance at the door; ‘go on.’

‘Well, the prince, having conquered all his enemies, came home in triumph.’

‘Oh, that’s jumping into the end. That won’t do at all. You must say *how* he conquered all his enemies.’

‘He will tell that when he gets home.’

‘Then bring him home.’

‘I did, when you interrupted. He came home——’

‘But how—how?’

‘ By the tidal train.’

‘ Horrible ! Princes never come in trains—of that sort. Let *me*’ (another glance at the door) ‘ tell how he came.’

She stood up, her head thrown back, her eyes sparkling, and began :

‘ The sun is shining on tower and tree. Joy-bells are ringing. From the hill-tops go up faint lines of blue smoke—wraiths of the bonfires which have blazed all night to guide his ships to port. The courtyard of the castle is buzzing like a hive of bees. I see the shimmer of satin and pearl, the waving of plumes, the gleam of arms. I hear his name on every lip. He has landed; he is coming; he has come ! With a rattle and a clang up goes the portcullis ! down rumbles the drawbridge ! To the blare of trumpets in they come ! First, his billmen, then his archers, then his squires

(one with his pennon, and one with his lance) ; and then—his crested helm hanging at his saddle-bow, bareheaded, in his silver armour, bowing right and left to one great shout of welcome—HE rides in.—That's the sort of way to bring a conquering hero home !' she concludes saucily.

‘ And the beautiful princess ?’

‘ She has come down from her bower attended by her maidens, and having a loving cup.’

‘ Well, we will suppose that he has had his drink——’

‘ Drink ? Ribald ! There is a dungeon beneath the castle moat for one who dares to call malvoisie, sparkling in a golden cup, crammed with flowers in the hand of a princess, “ *drink* ” ! It's a poem.’

‘ All right. He's had his poem. Go on.’

‘ I only undertook to bring him home, and I’ve done so,’ another anxious look at the door.

By this time Dick had taken in the situation.

‘ It’s my turn now,’ he said, and took up his parable with a face full of mischief.

‘ As the prince journeyed homeward, he met a good old man.’

‘ The usual hermit ?’

‘ No. Not exactly a hermit, I think ; but he took a deep interest in the beautiful princess, and gave the prince some advice.’

Stella guessed in an instant who this adviser was. She rose, and walked towards the window to hide her burning blushes and struggle against bursting into tears. She felt she had been betrayed, and I don’t know what would have hap-

pened if Dick had not dropped his saucy tone.

‘ Please don’t go so far away,’ he pleaded. ‘ I cannot talk loud ; it is bad for—for my ribs.’

‘ Oh !’ she faltered, and turned.

He rose, and came towards her.

‘ That advice,’ he said, ‘ was well meant, but the prince did not dare to follow it.’

She breathed again, and, as the great Duke wished for night or Blucher, she prayed for ‘ mother ’ or the tea-tray.

‘ The prince,’ he continued, ‘ gravely dismounted, put aside the—*poem*, and stood before the princess—as I am standing before you. She turned from him—just as you are doing—and his great love for her made him bold. He lightly touched her cheek—so—and turned her face to his. To his infinite joy, there was not a shade

of anger in it. Out of her sweet true eyes there rose a stream of light as pure as that on which the Holy Grail slid down to Arthur's blameless knight ; and he—sinner that he was—saw, or hoped he saw, in it the quest of his life. Its magic drew him to her, and, with all the reverence due to a holy shrine, he laid his lips on hers—thus.'

* * * * *

Now look you here at the difference between the saying and the doing of things ! ' No beating about the bush ; no la-di-dah business. Catch on, and kiss her right in the mouth.' Horrible ! in the *saying*, but there was nothing the matter with the *doing*: only you have to be careful how the doing is done.

She did speak to him again. She told him that she was not conscious of any

hour of her life in which she had not loved him ; and then—woman-like—she wanted to know the when, and the where, and the how, of his love for her. 'This made him grave.

'Darling mine!' he answered, 'I will confess that once I thought I loved another.'

'Oh, Dick !'

'You were a child then, and long before I saw you as you are, I thanked God for her falsehood.'

'Why, did she not love you?' (the idea of any woman not loving Dick !).

'I was barely twenty-one, and a country boy ; she, in her fourth London season. She played with me.'

'May I know who she was ?'

'Not now, my own ! When we are married I will tell you—if you ask.'

‘ I think I shall ask ’ (half to herself).

‘ But, Dick dear, you did love her ?’

‘ It was calf-love.’

‘ What is “calf-love”?’

‘ In comparison to man’s love—my love for you—what a rainbow is to the sun.’

‘ How poetical we are !’ (smiling).

‘ I caught it from you.’ He started up and imitated her. ‘ The sun is shining on tower and tree. Joy-bells are ringing—what was it about the smoke ? Yesterday’s smoke was proudly cavorting in satin and pearl——’

‘ Hush ! How dare you make fun of me ! Let us talk of something else.’

And they did.



CHAPTER VII.

THE 'PIECE OF SILVER.'

'Now,' said Dick, in his masterful way,
'to business. When are we to be married?'

'Oh, not for a long time.'

'Nonsense. I've got to go back to America.'

'Oh, Dick!'

'And I'm not going alone.'

'Ah—h. Shall we stay there—long?'
(anxiously).

'A month or two. I want to show you something I've got there.'

‘Why didn’t you bring it home with you?’

‘I couldn’t. It’s a piece of silver.’

‘Fork and spoon, or something pretty?’

‘Rather handsome than pretty.’

‘For me?’—saucily.

There is something delightful for my mind in the way *fiancées* and young wives grab at the man and his belongings. First they are ‘yours’; then (for a little time) ‘ours’; then (in perpetuity) ‘mine.’

Dick laughed.

‘Some of it,’ he replied. ‘Darling, did you ever hear of the “Mariposa”?’

‘What is a Mariposa?’

‘In Spanish it means butterfly. This Mariposa is a mine, and for years was a very daughter of the horse-leech. “Give! give! give!” was her cry; and the more she got, the more she wanted; and all

she returned was perplexity, ingratitude, and disappointment. There were five men in it—one was a practical miner who could not write his name, and had melted his last dollar into whisky, but knew all that was to be known about silver ; another was a bull-headed Englishman who had a little money and didn't care what became of it, or of himself, for that matter ; and there were three others who stuck to him. They pegged away, hiring labour as long as they had the means to pay for it, and then they worked themselves. Privation and disappointments drove four of them almost crazy, and made a rogue of the other. He ran away with the first profits they gained, just when the bad luck seemed to have taken a turn. It was sickening. They sent the bull-headed Englishman after the thief, because——'

'They sent *you*,' Stella interrupted. 'You are telling your own story, Dick. They sent you because they trusted you. Don't! I am interested. Go on.'

'I caught him, made him disgorge, and sent the money back. It acted like a charm; but never mind that now. At New York I heard for the first time, and quite accidentally, that my uncle was dead, and came home, thinking that surely there was something for me, and you know what I found. I was a pauper Earl and a scoundrel.'

'No, no.'

'That's over; but in clearing my name I had to neglect my business. Thank goodness, it took care of itself; for from the moment the thief left, and the stolen money came back, our Mariposa repented of her evil ways. Let me read to you

what the *Mining Record* of last week says of her (he took a newspaper cutting from his pocket-book, and read) :

“ *The unprecedented output of the Mariposa silver-mine continues unabated. Lumps and slabs of the white metal, from five to forty pounds in weight, come up by the dozen. It seems as though some gnome king had robbed the country and melted down his plunder in this favoured spot. There are no quotations of its shares, as they are all held by four persons, who naturally are indisposed to sell.*”

‘What do you think of that? That’s my handsome piece of silver.’

‘Oh, Dick! I do not know what to think,’ she said. ‘Are—are you rich, then?’

‘At present I am as well off as any Wadehurst has been; and if all goes on

well for another year—and I don't see why it shouldn't—I shall be quite a rich man, my darling.'

'But you've let your house. I don't——'

'I'll tell you. In the first place, I thought that, if it were known I was well off, some kind people would say that I paid for the discoveries I made at Havre, and the Strathfolias had swallowed them for a consideration. In the next place, I wanted to keep the good news till I could tell it first of all to *you*; and I haven't had a chance till to-day. As for Wadehurst House, it will be ready for us when we come back from America.'

'But Mr. Hankin——'

'Is going back next week to keep our Mariposa in good humour till we come out.'

Further explanation was checked by a

discreet shuffling in the hall, intended as a warning ; but happy Dick was shameless. As Mr. and Mrs. Applejohn entered, he threw his good arm round Stella's shoulder, kissed her, and—for his first greeting to his hosts—said :

‘ Look here !’

Stella threw herself into mother's arms and began to cry. Old Mark rattled his silver, and growled :

‘ Horribly afraid, was you ? Seems to me there ain't—there isn't—much shyness now. Well, well, there's my hand on it, and I wish you joy ; and, I say ' (warming up), ‘ break that lease. It isn't signed yet, and you can throw this Hankin over. I'll pay the smart money, and I don't care how much it is. I'll pay him for what he's done, and I'll take his contracts off his hands and make 'em good. I'll do all he's

undertook to do, and more, if you'll only break the lease. I'd give my right hand to see my gal there as mistress, where she belongs.'

'What's that?' asked Stella, looking round and drying her joy-tears.

Mark took her face between his hands and said:

'My pretty—not very long ago, when you wasn't—you weren't looking as bright as you are now, I told you that we—mother and I—couldn't expect to keep you to ourselves, and that if Mr. Right-man came along, and you loved him, why, then we'd have to put up with it. I said that as long as we lived you shouldn't want for no—for anything, and I'm going to keep my word. Now, he' (with a chuck of his head towards Dick) 'has been too smart. He's gone and let Wade-

hurst—leastwise, he's *bargained* to do so ; and that bargain has got to be broken at any price. I said—and I say it again—I'd give my right hand to see you Lady Wadehurst of Wadehurst.'

She danced with joy, and clapped her hands like a child.

'Send for the chopper !' she cried, 'and lead him to the block. Off with his—head !' Then, drawing herself up, and with a haughty gesture, she continued : 'The Countess Wadehurst (elect) presents her compliments to Mr. Mark Applejohn, and begs to inform him that Earl Wadehurst *of* Wadehurst is now engaged in preparing the family mansion for the reception of his bride.'

Then they told him.

He slapped his knee, put several shrewd business questions, which were

satisfactorily answered, and laughed at mother's exclamations of wonder and delight; but upon the whole did not (as Mr. Hankin would say) 'enthuse worth a cent.' Indeed, there was rather a sad look on his ruddy face as he looked round at the end, and said:

'I don't see where *I* come in—now.'

About a speedy wedding, he was breast high for Dick.

'What's the good of fussing?' he asked. 'It's got to be — get it over. Business is business. A man who has a property like that is bound to look after it. How long will it take to get our dear her clothes and things — a week?'

There was a duet of expostulation, and eventually a compromise was effected, under which the happy event was fixed for

some day early in April. This gave nearly five weeks for the clothes and things.

‘And you need not bother yourselves about the repairs,’ said Mark; ‘I’ll look after them.’

He rattled his silver, and whistled a tune, and did his best to look innocent; but Dick was weary.

‘Trespassers will be prosecuted,’ he laughed. ‘No admission except on business.’

Then came another wrangle and another compromise. The Applejohns were to give their ‘dear’ the furniture of her own particular rooms, and they were all to drive over next day to choose it.

All this time the rain was pouring down, but Dick had to brave it.

'I've got to be shown to about forty people at dinner to-night,' he explained, 'and there is no getting out of it. I'll be back in the morning, and' (this to Stella) 'I suppose I ought to "ask papa" as a matter of form?'

'Ask him kindly, dearest, please,' she whispered.

When he had left (after some delay in the hall), old Mark stood with his back to the fire, and chuckled.

'Mother,' he said, with a twinkle in his eye, 'I've got that horse back.'

'Oh, my love! you must not attempt to ride him.'

'If yon slip of a parson can manage him, I can. He's quiet now, and I got him broke for nothing. He's worth all I give—gave for him, and more too.'

And he balanced himself on his heels

and his toes, and chuckled again. It was a great consolation to feel that he had got the better of Dick in something.

Stella came in rosy. It costs some exertion, you know, to wrap a mackintosh round a man who has his arm in a sling ; however, she did not call for help. They managed it between them, and Dick got dry to his carriage.

The expected ' forty ' were thinned out a little by reason of the floods ; but as the house - party numbered nearly half the county, and several others had been asked to come early and stay the night, it was a goodly mustering. Dick had the place of honour, with the Lord-Lieutenant's wife by his side, and, being in radiant spirits, scored heavily. This sort of function is a ticklish affair. Everyone knew what

was meant, and did not know exactly what to say. There was stiffness and gloom till Dick (who was rather late) appeared, and as he conducted himself as though nothing whatever had happened, and was in the habit of meeting 'the county' twice a week, a sigh of relief went round. There was no necessity to say anything.

'By Jove!' remarked the men, 'how well he does it!'

When the ladies had retired, the Lord-Lieutenant's wife (she had been a famous beauty, and sometimes said risky things) told Mrs. Mac :

'Wadehurst is ab-so-lutely charming. Of course he ran away with somebody. I think I would have run away with him myself if he had asked me.'

'You are a dreadful woman!' Mrs. Mac

replied with a playful fan-tap. 'But he is nice, isn't he?'

'I wonder why all the nice men are poor, and all the rich ones——' (she was going to say 'horrid,' but thought of Macgruther. Macgruther did not approve of her, and she knew it, but her position demanded that she should be one of the *dramatis personæ* in this play). 'You must find him' (meaning Dick) 'a rich wife,' she concluded.

Long before this time it had leaked out that Dick's injuries had been sustained in an honourable cause, and that he had acted gallantly. So he was elected a suffering hero, and on his return to the drawing-room had to be enthroned on a luxurious sofa, with a lovely satin 'meal-bag' at his poor back, and to be pitied all round.

Colonel Daly, of course, happened to know the circumstances.

'Our friend,' he said, 'don't like them to be talked about, but I don't mind telling *you*' (this seriatim to a dozen): 'This fine fellow, you know, was walking back to his hotel one night, and made a short-cut through some slum where a ruffian was beating his wife. He knocked him down, and was immediately set upon by a crowd of roughs who beat him dreadfully and robbed him of his watch; but he nearly killed four of them. Gallant, very; but rash. "Those who in quarrels interpose." Ha! ha! ha! You know the rest.'

'But why was he taken to Mrs. Mac's house?' asked someone.

'Because he asked to be, I suppose,' said the Colonel with a snap. He did not

like his stories to be questioned. Where he got this one, or whether he evolved it out of his inner consciousness, will never be known. No one contradicted it, and it passed.

So the rehabilitating banquet was quite a success. Dick laughed in his sleeve as he thought of the *coup* he might have made. This, however, had to be delayed till he had obtained papa's official sanction. He grinned a little at having to go through another similar ordeal. He had passed the squire's, and on the following Wednesday was to face the bishop and the clergy, and minor members of the congregations committed to their charge; and he had to serve out his week at the Manor House according to treaty before he could be free.

'Never mind,' he told himself; 'it's all for my darling's good.'



CHAPTER VIII.

‘A WOMAN SCORNED.’

NEXT morning Dick called at the Rectory and asked papa kindly, as he had promised. Beginning at the right end (from any papa's point of view), he said he was in a position to make ample settlements upon the wife of his choice, and then disclosed whom he had chosen. Mr. Barbour mingled his blessings with tears, and regretted that Mrs. Barbour had just slipped out. Dick did not, and cut his visit short. With Stella at one end of the line and Mrs. Barbour expected at the

other, you may guess what instructions he gave to his coachman.

The Rector sallied forth, found his better half, and, breathless, told her the new wonder.

‘Dear me!’ he wound up, ‘how we have all been mistaken!’

‘Speak for yourself, Barbour,’ she replied. ‘That young man never deceived *me*. I saw through his too ostentatious pretence of poverty—coming down here and furnishing two rooms, and buying a worthless horse! He overdid it, my dear. If you have any memory, you will recall what I said months ago on this subject.’

‘You said it was foolish of him.’

‘It is foolish of *anyone* to try and deceive me!’ (decisively). ‘Now tell me exactly all you said.’

‘I don’t know—I can’t remember. I

was so surprised, so overjoyed. He didn't give me a chance of saying much.'

'As soon as you felt yourself becoming idiotic, you should have sent for me.'

'My love, he would not wait.'

'Did you mention Langley?'

'Oh dear no! that would have been so indelicate.'

'Indelicate! Really, Barbour, the way you throw your chances—*our* chances—away is absolutely wicked. You will prepare to walk over with me to Wood End directly. Of course he has gone there, and it is our duty to see our dear child at once, and congratulate her. You will throw out a hint that it would be nice for the two girls to be married at the same time; and then, if Applejohn has any sense of propriety, he will offer to provide the breakfast for both.'

‘The breakfast for Ellen does not matter so much as her trousseau,’ he sighed.

‘Leave that to me. Go and put on your goloshes.’

‘I think I might venture to ask Jinks to lend us his gig. The roads are so muddy; we shall be dreadfully dragged if we walk.’

‘*I want* to be dreadfully dragged,’ she replied. ‘Mind that you splash yourself as much as you can. *I* will splash you if you don’t.’

Just as they were leaving, the curate came with news that two men had come from London about the Fairlock weir, and were staying at the Crown Inn. One of them was a hydraulic engineer.

‘And,’ said Percy, ‘he is not a bit too soon, for threats have been made to cut

the dam going to Wood End.’ Well, I’ll walk a little way with you, as I have to see Mrs. Rawlins.’

‘Again?’ asked the Rector.

‘It may be for the last time.’

‘She has led a very wicked life. Is she repentant?’

‘Not as I could wish her to be, but overwhelmed with remorse and terror of death.’

The plight in which Mr. and Mrs. Barbour arrived left nothing to be desired in aid of the latter’s plan. They were indeed ‘dreadfully draggled,’ and in this condition the lady threw herself upon Dick’s neck and kissed him; and as Stella insisted upon taking her mother upstairs to get dry things, he (poor man!) had nothing at hand to take the taste out of his mouth.

The Rector, attired in rather a 'loud' suit of 'dittoes,' belonging to Mark Applejohn, felt unclerical but warm; and rejoiced when his wife reappeared in a costume which gave her no right to deride him. Stella's skirt was a foot too short for her, and exposed a wealth of stocking never before beheld.

Too often and too loudly did she contrast her dear child's prospects with those of her poor old father and mother. *She* would never have to tramp in the mud and the rain; *she* would not have to delay her marriage like her poor sister; *she* had only to ask for what she wanted; and so on. This was torture to Stella, and she could not look her Dick in the face.

As they were going out to luncheon, he lingered behind, and whispered :

‘Never you mind, my darling. I’ll settle that. It’s all in the day’s work.’

Later on he took the Rector into Mark Applejohn’s den, and settled it in his own masterful way.

‘I cannot give you Langley, Mr. Barbour. I intend it for a very dear friend—one who has always stuck up for me’ (Barbour winced); ‘but I hope to oblige you in another way. I think that there is a difference of two hundred and thirty pounds a year between the stipends of Fairlock and Langley, so (with your approval) I shall arrange that Stella will allow you—let us say—two hundred and fifty.’ (‘Oh!’) ‘And as I am sure she would like you to start fair, if you will kindly furnish her with a list of any little bills that may be outstanding, she will see that they are paid. For my own part, I

should esteem it a favour if you will permit me to make my pretty sister-in-law a present of her trousseau.'

Dick sent them home in his carriage, and as they went Mrs. Barbour observed :

'All *I* did turned out admirably, but of course *you* blundered. Why didn't you remind him of the glebe-land at Langley ? That is worth an extra fifty pounds a year, and we only got twenty. Why did you venture to act alone ? Why didn't you send for me ?'

'My love, he did not want you,' the Rector replied with perfect truth.

'No ; he knew how soft you are, and that he could make any terms he liked with *you*. Now, mind you put down every penny we owe—no shirking. If it's only half a crown, put it in the list.'

Tuesday was an off-day at the Manor House, and Dick knew that during the interregnum between tea and dressing for dinner he might find Mrs. Mac alone in her boudoir, to which he had the *entrée*.

‘I’m *so* glad,’ she said. ‘It seems an age since we had a talk. Sit down and make yourself comfortable.’

‘I am interrupting you’ (glancing at the writing-table covered with notes, etc.).

‘Not a bit’ (throwing down her pen and seating herself by the fire); ‘this will keep. Where have you been to all day?’

‘Oh, to all sorts of places; but look here: I want you to tell me something. What does a girl’s trousseau cost?’

‘It depends on the sort of girl.’

‘Well, she’s about the size of Lady Adela.’

‘ You silly fellow ! As if size mattered ! What sort of society is she in, or going into ?’

‘ County society. It’s Nelly Barbour.’

‘ Who is engaged to young Smallpage—a capital match for *her*. But what in the world have you to do with Miss Barbour’s trousseau ?’

‘ I want to give it to her.’

‘ Ridiculous ! These people have no sort of claim on you. Besides, you can’t afford it !’

‘ Tell me how much it will cost, and then I can judge.’

‘ Not less than three hundred pounds. Give her a tea-pot, or something ; but don’t think of being too absurdly generous. Barbour has always hated you, and so has his wife. They wouldn’t give *you* anything.’

Dick thought of what he had taken from them, and smiled.

‘Dear Mrs. Mac,’ he said, ‘you shall be one of the first to be told, and to wish me joy. I am going to be married.’

She sprang up, pressed one hand to her side, and groped vaguely with the other for support.

‘Married!’ she gasped. ‘*You*—married!’

‘Why not?’

‘Oh, Dick, this is a bad joke! It isn’t fair! You’ve made me feel quite—quite giddy.’

‘I’m sorry. Was I too sudden? I thought it was only bad news that had to be broken. However, there is no joke about it. Stella Barbour has done me the honour to accept me.’

‘That child!’

‘Come, come! considering that her younger sister has been engaged for the last six months, there’s no child in it.’

‘And it—it is settled?’

‘Certain as the grave.’

There was something in his tone which gave her the idea that he spoke with regret; and she darted to this conclusion.

‘You are going to ruin yourself out of some mistaken sense of honour. You have flirted with the girl, and been trapped into an offer. Good heavens! how could you be such an idiot! Break it off, Dick—break it off at once, before it’s known! Why should you marry at all?’

‘Because I love a woman who loves me.’

‘Loves you! Pshaw! No woman who loves a man would drag him down to

poverty. You have nothing but the rent of Wadehurst to live upon, and are an Earl! Oh, Dick, Dick, how could you! (wringing her hands).

'I don't think there is any "dragging down" about it,' he replied quietly. 'You can make your mind easy about that.'

'I understand. You are counting on those Australians. You think they will leave her their money. How do you know they have any money? They don't entertain; they keep no carriage. Vulgar people always try to show off, if they can. I don't believe these are rich. Have you made inquiries?'

'None whatever.'

'Have they made you any promise?'

'I did not ask for any.'

'You are a perfect infant, and your

friends must take care of you. I shall send for Mr. Barbour, and point out——’

‘You will not presume to interfere in my affairs, Mrs. Macgruther,’ he interrupted with dignity. ‘You have said a great many things that offend me, and I have let them pass because, from your point of view, you think you are advising for my good ; but I draw the line at such impertinence as you now propose.’

‘But, dear Dick, think—try to *think*, and don’t be angry with me, your friend—the best friend you have. This girl is a paid companion. They will get another when she has gone. You admit you have no promise. They may give anything—everything they have got to the other. You have no right—you, a peer—to marry on a thousand a year! It would be beggary ; but as a single man—— Look

in the glass, Dick, and remember last night. We (Macgruther and I) will get you some good post under Government, and in the society we can command for you, you will soon forget this folly, and thank us for saving you from it.'

'There must be an end to this,' said Dick. 'You are mistaken in supposing that I am a poor man. Some speculations I made in America have turned out very profitably. I am as well off as any Wadehurst has been.'

'Oh, my God !'

'So, you see, all your prudential reasons fall to the ground, and you can have no others.'

Again she wrung her hands, rocked herself to and fro, and moaned. No shadow of suspicion crossed his mind, but

he was vexed, as all men will be, at seeing a woman suffer.

‘Come, come!’ he said. ‘This is nonsense! Why, you haven’t congratulated me on my good fortune, or wished me joy.’

‘Joy!’ she moaned, looking up with tearless face, writhing with pain. ‘Joy! when you are breaking my heart?’

He sprang from her side with an inarticulate cry of amaze, as though someone had struck him from behind.

‘Are you senseless?’ she continued. ‘Are you blind? Have I—a woman—to tell you that I love you? Oh, Dick, have pity on me!’

She slid to the ground, and knelt, sobbing, at his feet.

‘What have I said or done?’ he asked, as soon as he could trust his tongue to

“speak, ‘to bring this madness on you?’

‘Nothing. You have forgotten that once we loved each other. *I cannot.*’

This was sentimentality, and he put his foot down upon it without remorse.

‘You have,’ he told her sternly—‘thrice over. Once when you married; once when you defied me—here in this house; and again when, for some purpose of your own, you made a vile charge against my honour.’

‘You forgave me. You said, “Let the dead past bury its dead.”’

‘And you are raking it from its grave. Let us go further back, to when we were playmates, Bertha’ (it was the second time he had called her by her name since they parted on that fatal night. She looked up with a sudden gleam of hope. His face

was kind, but grave. Not a touch of weakness in it), 'before what you call the world spoiled you, and we were dear friends. You trusted and obeyed me then—obey me now. Throw this vileness out of your mind, as you would fling aside some filthy rag that had fallen on your arm. It is not love—it is *vice* !'

'You need not insult me.'

'I must, if telling you the truth be insult. Oh, Bertha ! rise, and be yourself again' (he took her arm, and by sheer strength brought her up standing). 'Just think where this has led you—you, a wife, a mother, a woman, who has won a proud position as a purger of fashionable sluttery. Cast it out.'

'Let go my arm—you hurt me !'

'I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be rough.'

‘No—only cruel!’

‘You will thank me to-morrow—if I am here.’

‘Oh, you must not leave!’

‘How can I stay after this?’

‘You must! you shall! No excuse would do. Macgruther would suspect. It would be my ruin. Leave me something!’

* * * * *

‘I am sorry to tell you,’ said Mr. Macgruther to his assembled guests, ‘that my wife is suffering from a bad attack of neur-algia, and is unable to join us at dinner.’

‘And what is the matter with you?’ asked the Lady-Lieutenant of Dick, when that meal was about half over. ‘You were a sky-rocket yesterday, and the stick to-night.’

‘I’ve been worried about — things.
“*Nec semper tenuit arcum Apollo.*”’

‘Of course there’s something wicked in that, as you put it in Latin. Redeem yourself, and tell me what it means.’

‘It means that even Apollo does not always keep his bow strung.’

‘Only that?’ said the lady—disappointed. ‘Dear me! Is that rain again? Will it *never* hold up?’

In the smoking-room, later on, Dick took his host aside, and told him all the truth about himself, and one white lie.

‘I wanted to tell Mrs. Mac first,’ he said, ‘but did not get the chance. Will you tell her for me?’





CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET OF THE LAKE.

RAIN! rain! rain! Thunder, lightning, storm and rain! The waters of the lake were lapping at the wall of the front terrace, and only a few inches were left for them to pass under the arches of the bridge. The hydraulic engineer from London saw the danger, and set a gang of men to dig a trench flanking the dam, to relieve it of a pressure which it could not much longer stand. It was hard work, for (as you have been told) the hills rose abruptly on the side opposite the house,

and on the other nothing could be done. Below, kept up by the shubbery wall (over which we have seen Dick escape), there was a sheet of turgid water three hundred yards wide, and rising rapidly, so that Mrs. Rawlins, although at the point of death, had to be removed to higher ground ; and, as will sometimes happen in such cases, the shock revived her a little. Percy Stanring found her less excited than usual, and more communicative. She told him some details of the transaction to which Dick has referred, not at all by way of confessing a sin, but as an example of the wickedness of others, and their ingratitude. Asked, with indignation, how she could expect otherwise, she scoffed in her wicked wisdom, and said :

‘ Fal—lal, lal ! The girl was pretty and wild. She had to go that road, and she

took it with her eyes open. Those who say different are liars! Why, she worshipped the ground he walked on before she ever came here! And he cared for her—yes, he did! more than for all the rest put together. He——’

‘I will not listen to this, Mrs. Rawlins,’ Percy interrupted warmly. ‘Offences will come; but woe unto them by whom they come. This is no time to deplore the loss of the profits of your sin.’

‘Profits?’ she whispered. ‘There were no profits. I was to have fifty pounds a year as long as he lived, and I got just one payment from him, and nothing from the girl—deceitful hussy! Let me tell you how it ended. One night, a week or two before the breakup at the Manor House, that old rat, Martin, came here and told me that Sir Claude wanted the girl got out

of the way, for fear they'd use her against him in the divorce case, and that if I helped he'd marry her, and give me two hundred pounds. I said, "All right, but I want the money down, and a written promise for the rest." The nasty old fox talked like a book; said he hadn't the money on him; that there was no time to be lost; that Sir Claude's word was as good as his bond, and such stuff as that; but I stood out like a fool. I didn't know then what a snake he was. I made him up a comfortable bed, and he left in the morning, promising to be back, as fast as the trains would bring him, with the money and the writing. Would you believe it! He sneaked over to Fairlock, saw the girl, and worked out his job behind my back. That's what I got for trying to make an honest woman of her.'

‘I will hope you had some good motive,’ said Percy, ‘and that now you will drop the subject. It is altogether disgusting.’

Rain, rain, rain! Thunder, lightning, storm and rain!

You cannot play billiards for ever. Whist by daylight was not encouraged at the Manor House. Mrs. Mac was not down to organize any sort of games, and so her guests had nothing to do but look out of window and watch the storm.

‘I am afraid,’ said one to Macgruther, ‘that your bridge is in danger.’

‘I hope not. The arches are wide, and it was built on dry ground, and very solidly, before the dam was made. The danger is there.’

‘I’m so sorry for those poor men digging

so hard in the rain,' observed a pretty girl.
'Won't they catch cold?'

'Would you like to go and hold an umbrella over one of them?' drawled an admirer.

'If I were a man,' she retorted, 'I'd do *something*. Lord Wadehurst says that if the dam breaks half the people below will be ruined.'

'By Jove! she's right,' exclaimed a Colonel of Engineers. 'Look here, Macgruther, can't we help? There are a dozen able-bodied men idle here. Who'll go?'

'I will,' said one; and then came an ungrammatical chorus of 'me too's.'

But at this moment there came a blinding flash of lightning, followed immediately by a crash and rattle of thunder such as is seldom heard in these climes. Some

women screamed, and all fled from the windows.

‘ Well, that *ought* to be the last of it,’ said the Colonel. ‘ It will clear up now. Come along, you fellows, and get your boots on.’

As he turned to go, the girl who had first spoken cried out :

‘ Oh, look ! look at the water !’

The water, which had hitherto been lashed into wavelets by the wind, and plashed by the rain, had become suddenly calm as to its surface, but mad in its action. No longer stagnant, it was filled with whirlpools, and went swirling past, whilst a distant roar came up louder and more loud ; and the louder it came the more headlong was the course of the flood.

The dam had burst !

Many remembered afterwards the warn-

ing of that clever but ill-omened Indian civilian respecting the tree: 'If some extraordinary high flood should loosen its roots, and a storm blow it down—good-bye to your lake.'

In reality it had been struck by lightning, but the result was all the same. In falling its roots tore up a mass of the softened earthwork, and out rushed the imprisoned waters, forcing their gate of freedom wider and wider as they rushed—tearing along with increased power as their work of destruction progressed. All foam and fury as they fell, they rallied, widened out, and formed for a charge down the valley. They charged like a moving wall, and down went all that stood firm before them. The cottage in which old Mrs. Rawlins lived was the first to go. It gave one topple, bobbed up again like some Brob-

dingnagian float, and raced away on its side as though a fish to match were towing it. Thorley flour-mill, being built of stone, shivered and collapsed, and there the worst of the damage ended, for, having gained open fields, the fury of the flood was lost in space.

By this time there were three yards of daylight under the arches of the Manor House bridge, where there had been only two inches before the break, and ere night-fall the lake rippled its last 'good-bye.' In its place stood a sheet of glittering mud, through which the little Spark meandered in a dog-with-his-tail-between-his-legs manner, as though he were ashamed of himself. Fortunately, there was no loss of human life, as everyone had abandoned their long-threatened houses; but the bill for damages which the obstinate conser-

vators of the dam would have to pay for haystacks, cornricks, and cattle was likely to be a long and a heavy one.

The clerical dinner was in one respect a failure. Dick and his affairs had, so to speak, been washed out by the flood. No one thought or talked of anything else, and conjectures were rife as to what would be found to see in the morning. Mrs. Mac was cheery about it.

‘No one can blame *us*,’ she said. ‘Those Spauldings are alone in fault, and they will have to pay for it. As for the lake, I am really glad it has gone. It was not healthy, so near the house. I shall have a rose-garden made, and throw rustic bridges over the brook. That will be much nicer. And how glad poor dear Sir James will be! Do you remember his

complaining of having to sleep next door to an eel ?'

At times she was unusually silent, and a cloud of weariness came over her beautiful face.

'I never remarked before,' said the bishop's wife, 'that Mrs. Mac painted. She generally looks so bright and fresh.'

All hands were up and out early next morning. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky. A soft warm breeze just moved the trees and scattered raindrops, which glittered in the light. It seemed as though Nature was begging pardon in tears for her late outbursts. Half the village was on the bridge or at the broken dam, talking flood, and laughing at those who were wading in the mud after stranded fish, flapping helplessly, an easy prey ; or engaged in the more difficult task of trap-

ping the wary eel. This pastime was heavenly to the Macgruther boys. There they were, shoeless, stockingless, with knickerbockers tucked up, splashing about with ecstasy and a landing net (for the possession of which they quarrelled) after their prey, unchecked, until their mother appeared and peremptorily ordered them out.

Now it could be seen why there was no cause for anxiety about the safety of the bridge. Its buttresses were founded on slabs of concrete, broadening downwards in steps, now high and dry out of the slime, and washed almost clean by the water which had swept past them—all but one. On this lay a long black lump, and as Dick looked down and noticed it, the sudden sense of faintness, which had seized him once before at this very spot,

came on again. He staggered, and would have fallen if Macgruther had not held him up.

‘Why, what is the matter? Are you ill?’ he asked.

‘No; it’s nothing. I was leaning over, and I suppose the blood ran into my head. But what is that—there on the second step?’

‘A lump of mud.’

‘Don’t you see something like a rope hanging from it?’

‘Yes, there is. Here, William,’ calling a stableman who was fish-catching with a pitch-fork; ‘come here and see what this is on the step.’

The man obeyed, thrust his fork into one end of the lump, and recoiled with a cry of horror.

‘My Gawd!’ he said, ‘it’s a dead body!’

The news ran like wild-fire.

‘Stand back!’ Macgruther shouted.
‘Let no one touch it. I will see.’

He swung himself over the balustrade and descended to the top step. William was right. Out of the torn end of the lump protruded the skeleton of a human foot. The shape of the *thing* told of the rest.

Macgruther’s cool head was equal to the occasion. He bade the servants bring buckets of clean water to wash away the mud. Under this appeared what might have been a rug or a blanket, bound round with ropes, but all so rotten that they crumbled away as the water was poured upon them.

‘This will not do,’ said Macgruther.
‘Stop! It must be taken away entire for careful examination. Is there any—I

have it. Mr. Parker' (this to his bailiff) 'take some man to the five acres and bring down a sheep-trough—the largest you can get. Be quick! Stand back, my good people, pray! This is no matter for idle curiosity.'

The trough was brought, placed at the edge of the step, and the *lump* carefully swept into it. As this was done, some heavy object rolled out and fell. It was found to be the barrels of a breechloader, plugged up at both ends with wine corks, and full of shot.

'Used as a weight to sink it,' said Dick under his breath. 'There has been a murder!'

The trough and its contents were carried carefully to the house, and a gang of labourers set to dig in the mud all round, and search it, for anything else which might

serve to identify the body, or give a clue to those who had placed it there. A carriage was sent into Poundbridge for Dr. Crawford and the coroner, and a messenger despatched to the police.

The visitors all flocked into the house. The crowd remained outside watching the digging and asking each other, 'Who could it be?'

'If them there bones be woman's bones,' said Clark (whom we have heard of as keeping the Crown Inn at Fairlock) 'I can tell you whose they are. They're the bones of Faith Goulding, who disappeared more than six years ago—poor gal! It's like she drowneded herself.'

'That won't do, Father Clark,' said the bailiff. 'What! tied herself up in a blanket, head and all, and roped herself

round, and then jumped into the water of herself? That can't be.'

'No, it ain't no suicide,' observed another; 'it's murder.'

'If it be,' Clark rejoined, 'I know the man with whom she was last seen alive, and I can put my hand on him.'

There was a chorus of 'Who is he?' but Clark shook his head.

'I'm a-going to keep that for the crowner,' he replied, and walked away to the house.

Faith Goulding has been mentioned several times in this story, but not by name. You have heard of her as the too pretty dairymaid in silk attire, whose evidence (if procurable) might have influenced the Queen's Proctor in the case of *Gault v. Gault and Birkett*, and again as the victim of an infamous bargain made be-

tween her putative aunt, Mrs. Rawlins, and the late Sir Claude Gault. She disappeared, and the loyal old housekeeper hushed the matter up without much trouble. Pretty dairy (and other) maids who went to church in blue silk and wore rings were subject to temporary retirements from the house of Gault, under several generations. Sometimes there was scandal and wrath, but in the particular case now under consideration there was no one to be surprised or angry—so far, until old Clark's suspicions revived the case, and put a new complexion upon it.

When he had seen the coroner, and it was known that the bones were really those of a woman, he became the greatest man in Fairlock, and the Crown did more business that night than in any ordinary

month. He had a rival, however, in the person of (once) little Willie Pell, now a hulking youngster of seventeen, who had some important recollections for the benefit of the police.

You may remember this boy as the son of the head-gardener, who had been whipped for telling tales of Dick; and it seems that this correction did not cure him of prying about Fairlock Manor and seeing things.

From information thus received, an arrest was made that night at Poundbridge railway-station, just as the hydraulic engineer and his companion were about to enter the mail-train for London.

‘Is your name Martin?’ the latter was asked by a stout man in a brown coat.

‘Yes, it is. Why?’

‘Wickham Martin?’

‘*Mr.* Wickham Martin, if you please.’

‘Did you ever know a girl named Faith Goulding?’

‘What’s that to you?’

‘I have a warrant to arrest you for her murder. Oh no, you don’t! You’ve got to go with me.’

Martin stormed and blustered, and tried to pick a hole in the warrant; but all in vain. He had to sleep that night (and many another) in Poundbridge Gaol.





CHAPTER X.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

IN the presence of Mr. Macgruther and the inspector of county police, Dr. Crawford carefully examined the gruesome contents of the sheep-trough, and made the following discoveries.

First and foremost, it contained the skeleton of a young woman of medium height, perfect except in one respect—*the neck was broken*; and there were indications that this had been done during life. There was also a fracture of the third finger of the right hand, but this had

healed, and was evidently of long standing. The body had been dressed when placed in the lake, as was demonstrated by the finding of buttons, hooks and eyes, and steels, such as are worn in corsets and the bodices of gowns. All the rest was reduced to a black pulp by the action of water and mud, and perforation by the creatures that had preyed upon the flesh. No trace of shoes was to be found, or any rings, earrings, or other trinkets, except a locket, attached to a rather long and slender gold chain (broken). From the position in which this was found, it seemed as though this had been worn in her bosom, and had slipped down when the chain gave way.

The outside covering had been either a blanket or a heavy woollen shawl, and the ropes wound round and round it in several

lengths were such as are used for clothes-lines, or for cording boxes for travelling, and had seen honest service. The ends were frayed out, and here and there were old knots, near one of which the inspector's sharp eyes detected the brass ring of a luggage-label, tied on with what the microscope afterwards proved to be silk braid. The label itself was gone.

The gun-barrels (whose weight carried them through the decayed outside covering, but which had evidently been included), having been cleaned, were found to bear the name of a fashionable London maker, and there is much more to be told about them in another place. They had been evidently used to sink the body, and called out 'Murder!' as clearly as Dick spoke the word when first he saw them.

Dick recoiled from this investigation, and took no part in it.

So much for the work of the flood as a detective. Well said Daniel Webster: 'There is no place on God's green earth where a murderer can bestow his victim, and know that his secret is safe.'

Now for Willie Pell. He remembered the day when Mr. Spaulding came, and took away two whole cartloads of boxes. This was the work so resented by Mrs. Fairfax. He (Spaulding) came alone, but shortly afterwards another man—stranger to Willie—appeared, and gave him a shilling to go and tell Faith Goulding that someone wanted to see her particularly, and would wait down by the small end of the lake. He earned his fee, saw the dairymaid go out, and then went home to dinner. Later on, just about dusk,

when the carts with the boxes had started, he saw Spaulding and the strange man walking towards the stables. There were no horses there then. They had all been sent away to be sold. The strange man had something long in his hand wrapped up in a piece of newspaper. Spaulding unlocked the harness-room door, and they both went in and fastened it behind them. Then they lit a piece of candle, and then came sounds of wrenching and hammering. Willie—influenced by what is sometimes called ‘thirst for knowledge,’ and sometimes by another name—rolled an empty barrel to the window and looked in. They were taking up a plank in the floor! When this was removed, the strange man was going to thrust the thing he carried under the boards; but Spaulding said: ‘No, no; I want that’ (meaning, as his

actions showed, the newspaper in which it was wrapped). He took it off, straightened it out, folded it, and put it in his pocket. Then Willie saw that the 'thing' was a *gun-stock*. They threw it into the hole, replaced the plank, and left.

Why had he not told this before? Well, he had got one licking for not minding his own business, and didn't want another. Besides, he didn't know nothing wrong about a gun *then*.

The stock of a hammerless breach-loader, exactly corresponding to the barrels we know of, was found by the police under the flooring of the harness-room, just where Willie told them to look for it. They took him to the station, where he identified Martin (out of seven others) as the man who had given him the shilling and helped to hide the gun-stock.

Old Clark had this to say : He was going to the Manor House on business, and saw Faith Goulding and a man he had seen before many a time, and knew to be the father of Mary Martin, walking along the path by the Spark before it widened into the lake. She had a large plaid shawl—such as gentlemen wear out shooting in Scotland—wrapped round her, and she was crying. Martin had hold of her by the elbow, and appeared to be coaxing her to go somewhere, for he (Clark), as he came up behind them, heard her say, ‘Why must I go?’ in a loud voice, as though complaining. When they saw him they turned round, and walked in the other direction.

The next day but one a gentleman came to the Crown and stayed there nearly a week, making inquiries for Faith

Goulding, and he couldn't find her 'no-where.' Mrs. Goodlake would tell them what he asked her, and what she told him.

What she told him was that the girl had left without notice, and that she (the housekeeper) had no idea whither she had gone. What she did *not* tell him was that the girl had left all her clothes and things behind her, and that she (the housekeeper) had packed them away in her box and sent it to the lumber-room.

She had to tell the whole truth now. Asked why she had acted thus, the dear old lady, with tears in her eyes, told them what she had suspected at the time (and which might easily have been true), and asked: What was the use of bringing more sorrow on her poor master?

'The girl,' she said, 'was always flighty,

and when her likes find themselves in trouble they think that everybody knows it, and they run. I was sure she had gone to—to where she would be taken care of.'

Dick was able to explain why a gentleman should have been sent from London to find the ex-dairymaid, as Sam Crawford had told him all about the efforts of the present Sir Horace Gault to keep his brother undivorced.

Caleb Pedley (brother of Job of the Rose), who had been head-gamekeeper of the Manor under Sir Claude, knew that the latter had such a gun as had been found half in the lake and half in the harness-room, but could not positively identify it. He knew that the one it resembled was in the rack in the gun-room before Sir Claude left, and had missed it

when all the rest of the shooting tackle was packed up and sent to London in the following spring.

Now let us sum up. There was a reason why Faith Goulding should be got out of the way in the interest of Sir Claude Gault. Wickham Martin was his 'private solicitor,' and in his company the girl was last seen. She left the house at his call—just as she stood—and never returned.

Nearly seven years afterwards the remains of a young woman are found (near the spot where Faith and Martin had been seen together), with indications that she had been murdered. Who was she?

Whoever she might have been, Martin and Spaulding were mixed up together in the crime, if Willie Pell were telling the truth. But how did either of them get

possession of the gun, and how came it that both were engaged in hiding away its stock ?

No one had seen Martin overnight. If he came from London that morning he must have travelled in the train with Spaulding. Spaulding had pre-engaged a fly as well as carts for luggage, and yet did not give his future father-in-law a lift, but left him to walk all the way. No one but Willie Pell saw them together that day. Spaulding returned to Poundbridge when his work was done, dined at the Rose, and left by the night mail. Martin went no one knew whither. This looked suspicious, considering that they were in the same service, though, perhaps, playing different parts.

If it could be proved that the murdered woman was indeed Faith Goulding, there'

would be a strong case against Martin as principal and Spaulding as an accessory. If she had to be considered as some person unknown, then there was still a case, but it depended upon the unsupported evidence of Willie Pell.

So far, the only clues to identification were in the locket and the broken finger. The locket was rather a smart one—too smart for an ordinary dairy-maid, but unfortunately poor Faith was not an ordinary dairy-maid. She wore silk gowns, and kid gloves, and dainty boots, and might have had a gold locket with a horse-shoe in pearls on the back, and containing a lock of hair and ‘the wraith of a woodland weed.’ The love-lock might have been cut from the head of any dark man, and the withered flower fell to pieces as it was raised. The chain was of

ordinary make, but rather longer than those generally used for a locket when it is intended for view on the neck of its wearer. It was shown to as many of Faith's former fellow-servants as could be found, and none were able to say that it had been seen in her possession, nor was any box or case in which it might have been bought discovered amongst her abandoned effects.

What young woman in this part of Hopshire had broken the third finger of her right hand? Dr. Crawford recalled only one such case, but that patient was dead and buried. No other doctor remembered having treated an exactly similar injury. Goulding had never been seen with her hand tied up. She used to be careful of her hands, and had a miniature box in crimson plush with brushes and

files and things to keep her nails in order. This, however, was not conclusive, as she had only been two months at Fairlock (coming from no one knew where), and might have been hurt when she was a child.

If Mrs. Hawkins had been in her right mind she could have probably given some important evidence on these points ; but she was not. The news (blurted out inconsiderately) that the body of Faith Goulding had been found, and Martin arrested for murder, threw her back into 'the horrors' and increased their violence.

Long and careful digging and sifting of the mud under the bridge was rewarded by only one find—a black cuff-button with an *S* in gold on its face. *S* stood for Spaulding, but also for the numerous family of the Smiths and the

Styleses, and there was not much in this, taken by itself.

The above succinct narrative of what was discovered, and what sought for in vain, is the outcome of investigations which lasted for many days, during which the coroner held his inquest, and, like a wise man, advised his jury to return an open verdict and leave the rest of the case to the police. Martin remained in custody, and the French authorities made no objection to delivering up Stephen Spaulding for extradition.

In the meantime Dick had served his week at the Manor House, which he left as though it were a penitentiary, and went back to Patsey and his two nurses. He also had 'the horrors' in a mild form. Even in Stella's company, with her hand in his and her soft eyes telling over and

over again the old, old story, he would see in fancy that hideous lump, and shudder.

As he had been the first to call attention to it, he was obliged to give evidence at the opening of the inquest, but left immediately. He only knew Faith Goulding by sight, and was far away when she disappeared. When others pressed forward to see the remains, as taken from the bridge, he turned away sick and faint, and nothing could induce him to inspect them afterwards. The whole subject was distressing to him—why, he could not explain even to himself—and he was actually afraid of it. This was not like Dick at all.

There was also Mrs. Mac's outburst to worry over. He knew what sort of an enemy she could be, and now he had done

that which we are told qualifies a woman for the leadership of fiends.

Fortunately there was plenty of pleasant occupation for him now to divert his mind. He had to take Stella all over the Wadehurst grounds, and note her wishes for the laying out of *her* gardens ; to go with her into every nook of the great house, and arrange for the decoration of *her* rooms. He had to go to town and buy the engagement-ring—such a ring ! Two big rubies and two big diamonds ; and the big rubies shone out of a bed of little diamonds, and the big diamonds out of a bed of little rubies—all set clear, so that if you held it up to the light it looked like a church window seen through the large end of an opera-glass. There was another ring, which cost much less in the shop ; and he had so many things to do all day

that Stella and mother were left uninterrupted to the mercies of those who provide trousseaux. They did a round of plays, and would have had a supremely jolly time of it, if that sickening *lump* could have passed out of Dick's mind.

The case against Martin and Spaulding had been taken up by the Public Prosecutor, and an eminent barrister was sent down to Poundbridge to conduct it on behalf of the Crown. There had already been two hearings before the magistrates, at intervals of a week, and now all the evidence we know of is 'in,' and it is expected that the prisoners will be formally committed for trial at the next sitting.

Shortly after their first remand, a lady in deep mourning, accompanied by a French *bonne*, took rooms at the Rose; and no one recognised her till she gave her

name. Could this pale, gray-haired, feeble woman, who had to be lifted from the carriage and carried upstairs, be the once beautiful Mary Martin? What a wreck! Her first request was to be taken to see her husband and father; but this was impossible, for Dr. Crawford (who had been called in) decided that she could not be moved without danger. It was madness he said, for one in her condition to have made a sea voyage, and subjected herself to the shaking of a railway train. She had a serious affection of the spine, and these exertions had made it acute.





CHAPTER XI.

WHO WILL 'PEACH'?

MARTIN and Spaulding did not meet except when at the bar before the magistrates, and were not allowed to communicate with each other even there. Martin assumed injured innocence, and was defiant. Asked if he had any questions to put to the witnesses, he replied :

‘Certainly not. There is nothing against me until you prove that the bones you have found are those of Faith Goulding. Why don’t you do so? Her aunt is living only a few miles away. I shall have

several questions to ask *her*. Why don't you call her, and make an end of this farce ?'

For the information of the Bench, in reply to this, it was stated that Mrs. Rawlins was very ill, and could not give any coherent statement.

At the second sitting, Mr. Rowland, counsel for the prosecution, began the proceedings by the announcement that the person referred to by one of the prisoners on the former occasion was dead. Then Martin bit his lip and changed colour. Spaulding slapped his hand on the bar, with an oath.

Called up for the third time, it was noticed that both the prisoners had become haggard and nervous, and that when first brought in they looked round anxiously, as though they expected to see someone ;

and they seemed to breathe more freely when this expectation was not realized.

There was, however, a surprise for them.

The chief detective in the case had been much exercised over that odd cuff-button, which ought to have a fellow somewhere. What would a man who had lost one such button, of no particular value, do with the other? Why, throw it away, and get a new pair. It seemed like hunting after yesterday's smoke to look for a cuff-button that had been thrown away nearly seven years ago. But this man looked.

He began at the lodgings which Sir Claude Gault had occupied in London, attended by his (then) valet, and drew them blank. He got the French police to search the prisoner's house at Dieppe,

and they drew it blank. Then, as a last resource (taking a hint from the hiding of the gun-stock), he made a thorough search all over the stables and the quarters which the ex-stud-groom had occupied. Now, there had been an interregnum of nearly three years between the break-up of the Gault and the commencement of the Macgruther régime. Macgruther did not hunt or race, and consequently had no need for a stud-groom. The master of his horse was a placid coachman who had long gone in double harness (matrimonial) with several results, which could not be accommodated in two rooms ; and so they were given up to single stablemen. One woman would have baffled all the detectives in Scotland Yard. She would have scrubbed the floors, and swept out the cupboards, and thrown away all the rubbish

left behind by Mr. Spaulding. No such piggery as was found could have existed in any domain presided over by a female mop. At the bottom of a press in which horse medicines had been kept, and under a heap of rubbish, there came to light—no, no button at all, but a canvas sack, such as is used for shot, containing the halves of a broken wine-cork and *a pair of woman's shoes*. These were muddy, mouldy, and partly eaten by the rats; but enough remained to show that they had once been smart patent-leather 'Oxfords' with high heels.

When all this was produced, many people in court (and some on the bench) did not know what to make of these. Then heads were put together, and as the whispering ran, the dullest faces brightened up. The sinker attached to the dead was

filled with shot—here was an empty shot-bag! The barrels were plugged with corks—here was one which might have been broken and replaced. No trace of shoes were found in that dreadful bundle—here was a pair, hidden away in a room which for years and years had never been occupied by a woman!

As they were laid on the side of the witness-box, Martin looked at the other prisoner and threw up his eyes with a gesture of supreme contempt.

‘I haven’t been in that room for—’ Spaulding began, but was interrupted by a kick from his companion.

‘Have you any evidence, Mr. Rowland, to show that the prisoners, or either of them, were in that room on the day in question?’ asked the presiding justice.

‘Not at present, Sir Philip. We know

that Spaulding had the keys and could have gone there,' was the reply for the prosecution. 'And that is as far as we propose to carry the case. We now ask that the prisoners be committed to the assizes (if your worships please) on two charges. First, with the murder of one Faith Goodlake; and, second, with the murder of some person unknown.'

These charges were read over by the clerk, and the prisoners were asked (under the usual caution) what they had to say.

Spaulding stepped forward, out of reach of interruption, and began.

'It's all his fault,' he said, with a chuck of his head towards his father-in-law. 'He wouldn't let me have a lawyer. He said he was lawyer enough for us both, and he has hashed the whole case with his d——d obstinacy.'

‘And *I* say,’ retorted Martin hotly, ‘that I’m not going to get into trouble, much less risk my neck, for an ungrateful brute like you!’

‘These recriminations cannot be permitted,’ said Sir Philip. ‘You have been asked what you have to say why you should not be committed for trial. If you had an advocate, he would probably advise you to reserve your defence; but we will listen to anything you may wish us to hear. You are on your defence. Have you any witnesses?’

‘Witnesses?’ Martin scoffed. ‘In a case of circumstantial evidence! No, sir.’

‘Can’t I have a lawyer now?’ Spaulding pleaded with dry lips. ‘This old fool hasn’t given me a show yet.’

Now, this was spoken out of ignorance,

for Martin had been very careful for them both. The few questions he asked were put so adroitly that the experienced counsel for the Crown pricked up his ears. But Mr. Spaulding's idea of cross-examination was examination conducted crossly, and so the effect did not strike him. He was especially angry when his companion in trouble called young Pell 'Willie' instead of 'you young liar,' or something of that sort. He had not sense enough to perceive that under this delicate handling Master Willie made some valuable admissions. Yes, he was fond of shooting, and was a pretty good shot. He once had a gun of his own. He did not buy it ; it was not given to him ; he couldn't remember of whom he borrowed it ; he had to hide it for fear of 'father.' He quite agreed with his questioner that there was

no harm in a boy going out after a few birds now and then just for fun ; but, as a matter of fact, he had been taken up for poaching.

Rowland knew what sort of defence this foreshadowed. It would be urged that the boy had stolen a gun, and, in fear of the keepers, had thrown away the barrels (where they might have been picked up by anyone), and lied about the scene in the harness-room. Those who hide can find.

Spaulding was told that he could have legal assistance, and so the proceedings terminated, and the prisoners were fully committed for trial.

'It's all right,' the barrister for the Crown whispered to his attorney as they left the court. 'These rascals have quarrelled, and one or the other will split.

Did you notice the look of the elder one when those shoes were produced ?'

' I wonder why they didn't hide those things all together with the gun-stock,' mused the lesser light of law.

' My theory is this : They made two visits to the stables—one to get ropes and prepare the gun (which Spaulding probably brought from the house), and the other to get rid of the stock, which they didn't want.'

' They might have used the gun entire.'

' Yes, or have thrown the stock into the lake ; but criminals are always stupid. These were cunning enough to take off the poor girl's shoes, but forgot to burn them.'

' And left the locket ?'

' Ah ! but they didn't see that. It

slipped down out of sight. How much time have I before my train starts ?'

' Nearly two hours.'

' Good ! Let us go to your office and talk it all over.'

When they were seated, he began again :

' Now, I want you to take notes of what I am going to say for the briefs. This Dr. Crawford seems to be a reliable man, and I believe he is right when he says the neck was broken during life ; but at the trial we shall have half a dozen so-called experts who will swear to the contrary. Evidence in support of his opinion must be obtained. Have you carefully examined the locket and its chain ? Good ! You have therefore noticed that the locket has a broad loop, such as would carry a velvet ribbon, and was intended to be worn on the throat high up ?'

‘ Exactly.’

‘ But it *was* worn suspended by a flimsy chain, long enough to let it fall out of sight. This gives me the idea that the wearer did not wish it to be seen.’

‘ I quite agree with you.’

‘ The loop being wide, and the chain so slender, she passed the latter twice through the former, and knotted it, to prevent it from slipping. Now, the formation of a woman’s bust would allow the weighted end to fall as far as the chain would go, and thus we can tell what portion of it was on the back of the neck. Do you follow me?’

‘ Clearly. Go on, please.’

‘ The break is exactly on the spot I have indicated. Look at it under a lens, and you will find that the links on both sides of the break are more or less crushed,

No flesh remains to give signs of an external blow ; but we have a fractured vertebra, and a chain broken over the very spot.'

'This is most important, Mr. Rowland. Why did not you mention it before ?'

'I am keeping it in reserve for my old friends, the experts,' the barrister replied, with a smile. 'Whichever of these rascals may split, it can be used to confirm his evidence ; but I think the case is strong enough already to hang them both. Still, we must not neglect anything. I hear Spaulding's wife is well off ; they will be ably defended. Do all you can to have the locket identified. That would settle it beyond peradventure.'

After some discussion of minor details, this conference terminated, and Mr. Rowland returned to town. When he comes

to write his reminiscences (a work which seems to be required from all celebrated criminal lawyers), he will devote many pages to this singular case.

Justices' day on this occasion was also market day in Poundbridge, and the town was full. Dick (who had returned the night before) was at the bank; Macgruther was at the court-house on County Council business; Colonel Daly was buzzing about the street attending, as usual, to other people's affairs. The old saying that 'murder will out' was justified in one way. No matter what might be the original topic of conversation with high or low, gentle or simple, the murder got into it in less than five minutes, and stayed there. As all roads are said to lead to Rome, so all subjects led, or (what comes to the same thing) were diverted,

into the murder. It was like the head of King Charles in poor Mr. Dick's memorial.

You might begin by trying to match a piece of silk, or asking for a subscription, or denouncing the profligacy of the School Board, or estimating the hop crop, or guessing who would succeed Mr. Stacey (now deceased) as Rector of Langley—you ended by talking murder.

In such a condition of the public mind, a report that Mrs. Spaulding had sent for Lord Wadehurst, and was going to make a statement, ran

'As fire in the stubble dried up 'neath summer skies
Goes crackling on before the wind, and widens as
it flies.'

A crowd collected in front of the Rose, and the excitement rose when it became known that messengers had been sent out to find Mr. Macgruther and any other

magistrate, and to bring them at once, as the matter was one of life and death.

After the lapse of about an hour, Lord Wadehurst came out, looking pale and agitated, and went to the court-house, where his stay was short. On his way back he was met by Colonel Daly, full of inquiry and reproach. What was going on? Why had not *he* been sent for? Could not he go in and hear?

‘We have two magistrates already,’ said Dick, addressing himself to the last inquiry.

‘Two! Then she is making a confession, eh?’

‘You must really excuse me, Colonel Daly. It would not be proper for me to answer you,’ said Dick.

‘But what on earth could *she* have to do with it? She wasn’t here at the time.’

‘That will appear hereafter.’

‘Well, well, well! I don’t see why you should be so reticent with me. You know I am not a man to blab about things. You seem to be in a great state of agitation. How can it affect you?’ asked the Colonel, with the persistency of the irrepressible American interviewer.

‘I have received a horrible shock—that is all I can say now. Please let me pass on.’

Colonel Daly was puzzled. What the deuce could it all mean? He tried to worry his way into the presence chamber of the secret, but in vain. He buzzed about, asking questions of all sorts and conditions of men, and garnered in all the gossip of the town. It would have been too sad for words if he had been obliged to go home without happening to know something.



CHAPTER XII.

‘THE AXE FALLS.’

THERE were no guests now at the Manor House, and to-morrow it will be deserted. The London season is in full bloom, and demands its Mrs. Mac.

Its Mrs. Mac is sitting alone in the small dining-room which leads out of the hall, dressed for dinner ; for, as I have already told you, she is always smart. She would dress for dinner if she dined alone, even when in the country. She was thinking of Dick, smarting still under the wound he had inflicted, hating him

with the hatred of a woman scorned, and loving him all the time as she had never before loved man. At first she thought she could not live to see him married, but her self-corruption worked so quickly that the time came when this did not seem to matter. He would get tired of his doll. How could such a baby-faced nonentity stand in *her* way? She would break her heart—that would be some consolation.

In the midst of such reflections Colonel Daly was announced, and fussed in.

‘I won’t detain you ten minutes, my dear Mrs. Mac,’ he began. ‘I thought you’d like to know, and as I was passing——’

‘Pray sit down.’

‘No, not now. I have an engagement’ (to go round and buzz). ‘Those fellows have been committed for trial. And what

do you think ? Mrs. Spaulding has made a confession. The whole county is ringing with it.'

'Indeed ! What does she say ?'

'Ah ! that is not known.'

'I understood you to say the county was ringing with it.'

'My dear Mrs. Mac, you are too quick ! I meant to say that the county was ringing with the *fact* that she had confessed. *I* happen to know the particulars, but am not at liberty to disclose them, even to you, at present. But it seems—hee ! hee ! hee !' (chuckling)—'that our agreeable young friend is not out of the wood yet.'

'Do you mean Lord Wadehurst ?'

'Yes—hee ! hee ! hee ! There's a screw loose somewhere. Those Martins, you know, vouched for his story about your poor dear sister.'

‘That can have nothing to do with the murder of a wretched dairymaid,’ Mrs. Mac replied haughtily.

‘Ahem! you don’t quite follow me. The presumption is that these ruffians were bribed by Sir Claude Gault. Now, if they would not stick at murder for one man, they could be easily got to make up a lie to please another.’

‘By Lord Wadehurst?’

‘Well—er—I will not go so far as that. I don’t think he is capable of such a thing as bribery. They might have done it, as I say, to please him in the first place, and for what they might get out of him in the future. Let us put two and two together, my dear Mrs. Mac. After his first excitement on finding the body in your lake, our young friend took the matter very coolly. He did not stop ten minutes at the inquest.

He would not look at the remains. He went to town, and took no further interest in the case—until to-day. If you could only have seen him to-day as I did, you would *know* that something had gone wrong. He came out from his interview with that woman as if he had seen a ghost. Now, as you very properly observed just now, the murder of a wretched dairymaid could have nothing to do with your poor sister. Nor could he be implicated in it, because he was not in England at the time. So, you see, there must be something else.'

'Tell me,' she said eagerly, 'what it is, and I give you my word——'

'I cannot. I would if I could, but, really, I am on my honour. Ask your husband when he comes back. He and Sir Philip took the confession. I was asked, first of

all, of course, but did not wish to act. But I must go. Dear me!’ (looking at his watch), ‘I had no idea it was so late. *Good* - evening, dear Mrs. Mac.’ And he fussed out, to buzz his news elsewhere.

If the flock this great lady led were sheep, and the thoughts that now came out of her mind were wolves, there would have been such a stampede that no two of the former could have been found in the same parish. She thought that if Daly’s suspicions were well founded she could crush Lord Wadehurst so that he should never rise again. False in one thing, false in all. If he had bribed the Martins, he might have bribed all round. Socially ruined, his intended marriage broken off, his name a byword for contempt—he might turn at last to her. Detected! baffled! infamous!

—what of that ? In the light of the wild passion she called love, she saw only the man for whose body it hungered. That ! for his character. The story of her sister's shame would be revived. No matter. If all went as she intended, she would be soon far away, where nothing was known of the past—far away *with him* !

This was the woman for whom the great world waited, as an orchestra, tuned up and ready to begin, waits for its chief ; the woman it regarded as its apostle ; the leader of its crusade against easy virtue ; its moral glass of fashion, and mould of immaculate form ! She had let one drop of corruption into her heart, and it had made her—this !

She awaited the return of her husband with impatience. Since her scene with Dick she had avoided his company as

much as she could. He, poor man ! was distressed at her altered manner, attributing it to ill-health caused by the excitement and exertion of entertaining so much company, and so was unusually attentive, even affectionate. He had lately seen more of his boys than heretofore. They were no longer nursery children, to be handed round (so to speak) after tea as a sort of extra course, and kissed, and sent away. They went out with him for walks ; he taught the elder one to ride ; he watched their eager but clumsy attempts to catch fish when the lake existed, and patiently answered all their childish questioning as to this and that. He caught a far-off glimpse of the time when they would become his companions, and his heart warmed to them and to their mother. Ah me ! just at the wrong time, when a smile

or a caress sent a cold shudder through her veins.

He came home. As she heard his step in the hall, she took up a book and pretended to read. He came into the room, and, not lifting her eyes, she did not notice (as the butler had) that there was 'something wrong about the master.' A man like Macgruther, precise as to his dress and proud in his manner, resembles some deep pool embedded in mountains, whose placid surface is rarely stirred ; but when disturbance *does* come, the ripples run from shore to shore.

He entered without a word, and stood by the table, behind her.

'What is this I hear,' she asked, 'about Mrs. Spaulding having confessed ?'

'How have you heard anything about it ?' he counter-questioned sharply.

'Colonel Daly told me. He has just left.'

'That fool!' he scoffed, with a gesture of impatience which upset a wineglass and broke it. 'Where are the boys?'

'In bed, I presume, by this time. It is nearly half-past eight. Had you not better go and change for dinner?'

She had turned at the breaking of the glass, and lifted her eyes as far as his knees. It was not his habit to scoff at anyone as 'that fool!' His speech was unusually hoarse and jerky. Never before had he come into her presence with muddy boots, and now they were very muddy. She might have looked higher, and found worse.

'Dinner?' he repeated vaguely. 'I am not hungry. Did I dine with Wadehurst? I forget.'

She looked up, and, to her amaze, saw that he had taken off his collar and tie, and was twisting them together into a rope.

‘Alex!’ she exclaimed, starting from her seat, and placing the chair between them. ‘Mr. Alexander! is it possible that you are—that you have been drinking?’

‘They made me take some brandy. It was not good. I drank a little, I know,’ he replied, with his hand to his forehead.

‘Roberts shall see you to bed,’ she told him sternly, taking a step towards the bell. ‘You are——’

‘Leave that bell alone!’ he shouted. ‘No bed for me; I might sleep, and if I did, I should wake to-morrow, and think it was all a dreadful dream, till the truth came crashing upon me *again*. It is hard

for it to come so without warning, unless it kills outright. That is what it should do—like a bullet through the heart. Why, when you are bitten by a dog, you have some time to wait, and to hope that he is not mad. What is it? Fourteen days, fourteen years? I forget. Little Hugh will be a man in fourteen years. Poor little Hugh! Perhaps I loved him more than his brother. He was the younger and the weaker, and had your eyes. Will it come upon him with a crash? How will he bear it when he knows why his mother married me?’

She stood like a beautiful statue of Scorn, rejoicing inwardly. The immaculate had fallen!

‘If argument be not thrown away on you in your present disgraceful condition,’ she replied, ‘the world in fourteen years’

time will be pretty much as it is now. We shall not have gone back into a state of nature, or become Utopian. Sensible girls will make good marriages, and become good wives—foolish ones will marry for love, and repent at leisure.'

'He will know,' Macgruther continued, not heeding her, 'that his mother, loving another man, sold herself to me for money.'

Now she heard the first rumble of the coming storm, and a tremor ran through her.

'He will know that she stood aside, and let her own sister be branded with adultery. Ah, poor boy! poor little fellow! He will know that her whole life was a lie.'

Here flashed the lightning, and it staggered her.

‘Alex!’

‘Yes; and he will know that she ruined his father, who trusted and was proud of her—poor fool!’

‘Alex, you are ill!’ she gasped. ‘Let *me* take you to your room.’

‘Don’t touch me!’ he almost shrieked. ‘The air is full of murder! I might kill you! Let someone take these knives away.’

Glad was she to press the bell-button, but help came from outside. A carriage dashed up to the front-door, and she heard voices in the hall.

‘Has your master come in?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Thank God!’ And in other moment Dr. Crawford, followed by Dick, was in the room.

‘Oh, Mr. Macgruther!’ panted the

former, 'what a fright you have given us! It was not fair, when you promised——'

'I gave you the slip. I do not want a doctor.'

'Indeed you do. Madam' (he whispered to Mrs. Mac), 'your husband has sustained some severe mental shock, and nothing but absolute rest under medical treatment can save him from the most serious consequences. Pray aid me in getting him to his room.'

'Oh, doctor! I have no influence. He has been talking so wildly. I thought at first that he—he says he took some brandy.'

'We made him, but that was before I knew what had happened. He was in a dead faint when they called me in. Brain-fever is the least danger now. We *must* get him to bed.'

'I think,' said Dick, 'that Mrs. Macgruther had better not interfere just at present. Let me try.'

The stricken man had not moved. He stood swaying himself to and fro, half supported by his hand on the table. With the other he was flicking the rope he had made of his neck-gear.

'Macgruther,' said Dick firmly, 'why are you so obstinate? If you are not ill now, you soon will be, unless you change those wet boots. Look what a mess you've made on the carpet! Dr. Crawford wants to speak to you, and he is in a hurry. Take him up to your room, and hear what he has to say whilst you change.'

'Now you are talking sense. Yes, I will see him as a friend, but he must not stay long. I—am—very—tired, Wadehurst, and—my—head——'

‘He’ll give you something to settle that. There now! like a good fellow, come up at once.’

He obeyed without another word, but when they reached the foot of the great staircase he fell, and they had to carry him. The rest was easy.

‘Do you know what upset him?’ Crawford asked, when the morphine had got to its work, and his patient was sleeping quietly.

‘I do; but I’d rather not say at present.’

‘I wish I had known before I gave him that brandy. I thought it was an ordinary faint. You should always tell the truth to a doctor. I see it now for myself. He has heard something about his wife. Your anxiety to get here before he did, and the state we found her in, prove that. It will be very hard with him.’

‘He is a strong man, both physically and mentally.’

‘That’s just it. Throw a stone at a lump of clay, and you don’t do much harm. Send it into the middle of a sheet of plate-glass — hard-polished, clear as was this man’s mind—and what happens?’

‘Is it as bad as that?’

‘It may be. There now! you cannot help me any more. I shall stay the night.’

Dick left, hoping to sneak out of the house unobserved; but Mrs. Mac was waiting for him at the door he had to pass, and barred him in.





CHAPTER XIII.

‘MY OWN SISTER!’

‘SHUT the door,’ said Mrs. Mac, walking towards the fire; ‘the servants are suspicious, and we must not be overheard.’

Dick obeyed, and unconsciously took the same position at the dining-table that her husband had occupied.

‘Don’t stand there’ (petulantly). ‘Come closer, and tell me the truth. Is this your work?’

‘No.’

‘He knows everything?’

‘Not *every* thing.’

‘ I wish he did ; it would be sooner over.’

Dick thought of what the doctor had said, and shuddered.

‘ This is my ruin.’

He bowed his head. He could not look at her. He had that feeling which comes over some of us in presence of the freshly maimed or wounded. We are sorry for them. We would do all in our power to help them ; but we cannot look at the quivering flesh, we turn away from the blood. She had the courage of despair.

‘ I suppose,’ she continued, ‘ that the creature Byngton has told.’

‘ Byngton ?’

‘ Yes—the one-armed pensioner. He was watchman in the gardens that night when we—parted, and he saw us.’

Dick remembered that there had been

something odd in the corporal's manner towards him, but more important events threw it back in his mind.

‘I had to silence him,’ Mrs. Mac went on. ‘I thought him honest, as his only condition for silence about us was that, if you failed in your search for my sister, I should admit enough to show she had been misjudged. We have arranged all that publicly, and I cannot understand why—— Ah!’ (recalling the wisdom of Colonel Daly), ‘I think I see now. That nice little romance you got up about Frances and the Martins; how they hid her in London, and sent her on her way to America—is there any truth in that?’

‘Not a word.’

She threw up her beautiful head with a smile of triumph—the first smile that had brightened her face for many a day.

'Then she was not murdered at Havre?'

'No; I was deceived.'

'Of course. My poor Dick, how could you expect otherwise from such creatures? I quite believe you. You let them know what you wanted, and they supplied you with something which would do. Here, with *me*, you can say you were deceived, but after all the fuss you have led your friends to make about it, you will find it impossible to get other people to believe you. You are back again just where you were—in Coventry, with me for company this time. It will be said that you bribed these Martins, and the rest—please don't interrupt—I don't say so, but others will. They will resent the imposition—yes, that will be the word—and an angel from heaven could not get you a fair hearing.

When my ruin comes out, there will not be much to choose between us.'

'You speak as though you wish this to be so.'

'It is our fate, and we cannot escape from it. Oh, Dick! you must not leave me to bear this alone. I care not if *all* you have said be false, and that you are poor. Let it be as it ought to have been at first. I love you, Dick! I told you so before my husband knew anything. Take me away. Think of me as you did that night when you pleaded so hard—when you foreshadowed the misery of my marriage without love, and tried to save me from it. Save me now from worse.'

Again she fell on her knees, and clasped him with her lovely arms.

'You have forgotten,' he said, 'what

I told you the other time when you gave way to this madness.'

'Pshaw!' she cried, springing upright. 'What honest girl would be allowed to marry you now? I know my world. You cannot make a fool of it *twice*. You are ruined.'

'Will you allow me to explain?'

'There can be no explanation. The man Byngton saw me throw that note tied to a key out of my window, and saw you read it. Somehow or other it has come to his knowledge that the Havre story is false, and he has told Mrs. Spaulding. How else could she know? It will be said that you came back from America for *me*; that I repulsed you at first and then gave in; and that we arranged the plot between us.'

'What!' he exclaimed with indignation,

‘when my whole heart was set on the dear girl who is to be my wife!’

‘Never!’ she muttered through clenched teeth. ‘If I have to throw away my honour in perjury, *that* shall not be. I am desperate, and will stick at nothing. But oh, Dick! don’t drive me into more wickedness. If you have any feeling, any heart, any justice, take pity on me. It is all your fault.’

‘Good heavens!—*my* fault?’

‘Yes; why didn’t you leave me alone? You never said a word till you saw that my people were throwing Macgruther down my throat. You made me tell my mother lies and deceive them all, so that we could meet without their knowledge. You tried to force me into an elopement the very night before my wedding-day.’

‘Do you remember the letter you wrote

to poor Frances, giving your consent to this, and your reasons for consenting ?'

'I know that I did write, but what of that ? It was for your sake.'

This line of argument touched him sharply.

'I was much to blame,' he said. 'I was young and reckless. I thought I was right then. Now I know that I was wrong, and I shall not shirk the consequences. When your husband has recovered, I shall tell him so.'

'Better tell your sweetheart.'

'I have told her.'

'Shame upon you ! Oh, you might have spared me this—to humiliate me before her ! It was detestable of you !'

'I told her that I loved another when she was a child. I did not give any name. Be good enough to leave her out

of this discussion. I shall admit to your husband that I did all I could to take you from him, but with this for consolation—that you never intended to go.’

She flushed crimson, and turned her face aside.

‘All my arrangements were perfected,’ he continued. ‘You had left the house unnoticed. We need not have delayed our flight for two minutes, but you went back for your diamonds.’

‘I wanted them.’

‘I told you that it would be little less than theft to take them, as they were wedding presents, and implored you to run no risk of detection. You broke away from me and went back, with my kisses on your lips, to be Macgruther’s wife. If you had told him the truth at once, he would have treated it as the folly

of a romantic girl, and forgiven you. He would forgive you now, if this were all.'

'All the rest came out of it.'

'Not by any act of mine. Let us end this. I will take all the blame that can possibly be thrown on me. I will shield you as far as I can. When you were my bitter enemy I spared you. I will be your friend, if you will let me; but not another word of what passed just now, or I will never see your face again.'

'You never will,' she said, with a sudden burst of tears. 'I cannot face this ruin alone. It will kill me, or I shall kill myself. I have climbed so high that everyone will see my fall. You don't know Macgruther; he will not forgive. He' (with a shiver) 'is too just. He might perhaps send me away somewhere, and hush the scandal up for the children's

sake ; but I suppose it will all be in the newspapers to-morrow.'

' I hope not.'

' The woman's confession will be published ?'

' Some of it ; all that relates to the case of Faith Goulding will appear.'

' That will not compromise me,' brightening up.

' Only indirectly.'

' I don't see how it can touch me at all, or why this Spaulding woman took up with Byngton and dragged my name in.'

' Because you start under a misapprehension, and will not let me set you right. You have jumped to the conclusion—why, you know best—that the revelations made to-day discredit me. I hope I do not misjudge you in thinking that this idea was a welcome one. No woman who ever loved

a man found pleasure in his degradation. Many would love him in spite of it, and pity him, and try their best to lift him up. No one worthy of the name would rejoice in his fall, because it brought him down to her. Men may do that sort of thing—women never! Think this over, Mrs. Macgruther, and give the frenzy, into which you have twice fallen, its right name. These are my last words on the subject, and for God's sake, Bertha—there, there, don't cry!—take them to your heart, and let them drive out the devils which possess it. Now for the rest. The revelations made to-day justify me more clearly than before.'

'You don't mean to say that Frances is alive?' she cried, starting up.

'I wish I could' (his face softened as he spoke, and his eyes filled). 'I would give

all I have in the world if I could say so. No, that gentle spirit, loyal and brave, is at rest—to my endless sorrow and remorse.’

‘If she ran away from her husband, no one can blame you. She did so once before, and they made it up. I suppose he abused her in his usual way that night when they caught you in the shrubbery ; but they made that up too. You don’t care a snap of your fingers about *my* ruin, and are full of sorrow and remorse for my dead sister. Why, if I had been in her place, I wouldn’t have lived six months with such a brute as Sir Claude. But she had no spirit, poor thing ! And you call her “brave” ! That shows how little you know of her character. I hope we have come to the end, and that there will not be a *third* version of her death and burial. Are you sure this time ?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘No chance of being *deceived* again?’

‘None whatever.’

‘I hope you are right at last. Well, go on with your explanation. You are a white-winged angel of innocence, soaring in a cloud of sorrow and remorse. I am on the ground, betrayed and disgraced. Will you kindly tell me how this came about, beginning with Byngton?’

‘He has nothing to do with it.’

‘Frances would never have trusted a servant. If Byngton has not told, who has?’

‘You have.’

‘*I!* This is no jesting matter, Lord Wadehurst.’

‘Some letters of yours to your sister were found, and amongst them the one I mentioned just now.’

‘The *idiot*! She had a whole day to burn them. Has Spaulding got that letter now? Has my husband seen it?’

‘He has.’

‘Good God! This comes of trusting fools! She should have destroyed every scrap of paper as soon as she had read it.’

‘She must have done so with a great many. What was found in her desk did not compromise us. She had no opportunity to destroy the last letter. It is good, for her sake, that she had not, for it helps to vindicate her.’

‘Everything for *her* sake—oh yes! I have sense enough left to see through the game. Put that letter and the one you wrote to Frank together, and you are both vindicated—at my expense. She has done you a right good turn. I understand now why you rushed out for two magis-

trates to take Spaulding's confession. How convenient it was to find my husband to be one of them !'

'On my honour, I did not know what was coming out.'

'How did it come out at all ? Did she not send for you respecting the murder of Faith Goulding ?'

'She did, to save her husband and her father, thinking that I was a magistrate.'

'That could be done without sacrificing me. I had nothing to do with them. I don't think I ever saw Martin, or Spaulding, or his wife. They were all gone long before we came here, and so I could not have done anything to make them my enemies. I ask you again, how came she to speak of me at all ?'

'You must know the sad truth sooner or

later, and I may as well tell it now, if you think you are strong enough, after all the excitement of to-night, to bear it,' he said kindly.

‘I can bear anything now.’

‘I have said that the woman whom the Martins hid in London, and who was robbed and murdered at Havre, was not your sister.’

‘Yes ; I suppose the whole story was false ?’

‘It was not all false. This woman was Faith Goulding. Now, can you not guess why Mrs. Spaulding had to confess ? The circumstantial evidence against her husband and her father—particularly that against her father—was very strong, if the remains found in the bed of your lake were those of the former dairymaid. To save them it was necessary to prove

that the body was that of another person. This has been done.'

'And you believe them? Pshaw! whose else could it be? Here is another romance, a second edition, revised and improved, of the Havre lie, and still I am in the dark. Suppose it *is* another person, where do *I* come in?'

'Two women, both young, have met with violent deaths. All the circumstances in the one case seemed to point to your poor sister as the victim. I was misled as to the manner and place of her death; but—she is surely dead. Bertha' (laying his hand on her shoulder), 'be brave. Ask yourself why her death should cause me sorrow and remorse. Ask yourself why that strange sense of horror should have come over us both when we crossed the bridge just over where those remains were

found. We were full of the other story then, and accepted it as truth. Was not that a warning ?

‘ No, no ! ’ she cried, ‘ that is too fearful ! It cannot be ! Dick, Dick ! you are—— Oh, it *cannot* be ! Who could have—— I can see it now—the awful, black, dripping mass, like the mound on a newly-made grave ! Was that ’ (sinking her voice)— ‘ my—sister—Frances ? ’

‘ Brave, loyal Frances ’ (here he broke down and sobbed), ‘ my dear old playmate, my more than sister, who was killed for my sake ! ’





CHAPTER XIV.

CONFESSIONS.

The Confession of Mary Spaulding, the wife of Stephen Spaulding, lately of Dieppe, in France, taken before Sir Philip Steadman, Bart., J.P., of The Olde Denne, in the parish of Langley, in the county of Hopshire.

My maiden name was Mary Martin. The persons accused of the murder of Faith Goulding are respectively my father and my husband. In the year 1880 I was lady's-maid to Frances Lady Gault. I well remember the night of Monday,

November 17. The evidence I gave in the Divorce Court respecting the meeting of my lady and Mr. Richard Birkett in the shrubbery is true, and I am told I need not repeat it now. I did not tell all the truth as to what happened when Sir Claude came back. That is what I have to confess to-day.

Whilst the hunt for Mr. Richard was going on, my lady went out into the shrubbery again, and seemed to be searching for something. In about half an hour she came back, and I persuaded her to go to her room—in the first place, because I feared for her to meet Sir Claude, and next, because her feet were very wet. I had just taken off her shoes when he came in.

He had been drinking. He accused her in the coarsest language, and when she

assured him that Mr. Richard had come to see her about something which related to a third person, he said, 'Then, by God, if you don't tell me who it is, I'll kill you!' She fell on her knees, and cried, 'Not now, Claude; I cannot tell you *now*. I have promised to keep it secret. Give me two days, and you shall know everything. Wait till Wednesday—only till Wednesday—dear Claude.' He replied, with an oath, that he would have it then, and, taking her by the shoulders, shook her violently, and threw her back on the bed with her feet towards the pillows. As she fell, a paper dropped from somewhere in her dress, and she snatched it up and crumpled it in her hand. He saw this, and told her to give it to him. Again she begged and prayed him to wait, but now he was furious. 'Give it me!' he shouted,

‘or I’ll shake the life out of you and take it!’ With that he lifted her up by her arms, and flung her violently backwards. In raising her she was drawn down a little further towards the bottom of the bed, and this time the back of her neck came in contact with the footboard. I heard a sort of dull crack, and when he raised her again for another shake her head fell forward, and I knew that she was dead.

It was then that I ran out to the stables, for I did not know but that he might attack me. He had struck me once for defending my lady. When I returned with Mr. Spaulding, we found him crying and moaning over my poor lady’s body, with the letter she had secreted straightened out on the bed beside her. I was for ringing the alarm-bell and making it known, but he pleaded with us to save him, and

threatened to kill himself. So, after a long discussion, Mr. Spaulding made me give in, and we agreed to keep it secret and hide the corpse. We had no other idea then than to gain time for Sir Claude to escape to some foreign country before the truth came out.

We wrapped up my dear mistress, just as she was, in a spare blanket, bound it round with box-cords, and my present husband got a gun from the place where the shooting things were kept, filled the barrels with shot, and fastened it as a weight to sink the body in the lake. We did not want the stock, so I hid it amongst some of my lady's summer dresses.

Before morning our plans developed. I suppose that, having got over the risk of discovery whilst carrying our dreadful burden to the bridge, we became bold.

It had been arranged that Sir Claude and my lady were to go to London on the Wednesday morning to be present at the marriage of her sister, now Mrs. Macgruther. We could pretend for a day or two that she was ill, and had to keep her room ; but if Sir Claude went alone, we were sure that the housekeeper would insist on seeing her, or send for Dr. Crawford, and so betray us. It was therefore agreed that I should personate my mistress, and I did so. I came down early and pretended to have a bad sick headache, and that my lady had excused me from accompanying her on that account. I asked to be left to sleep it off undisturbed, and Mrs. Goodlake (who did not like me) took me at my word. I then put on the gown my lady had ordered for the wedding, and, thickly veiled, went with Sir Claude to

London with clothes of my own in Lady Gault's large dressing-bag.

I left Sir Claude at the hotel, saw my father (to whom I told everything), and went back to Maidstone, where Mr. Spaulding met me and drove me back to Fairlock in good time to reappear as Mary Martin.

All the rest was managed by my poor father, whose ambition and only thought was to make a lady of me. Look at me ! I am not yet eight-and-twenty. I have not seen my husband ten times in the last three years. My children are dead. I am a hopeless cripple, and do not draw a painless breath night or day. Thank God I am dying, and have been given strength to confess my sin !

In answer to questions put by Mr. Macgruther, J.P., Mrs. Spaulding stated that after Lady Gault's death the paper which

she held in her hand was read, and disclosed the secret which had cost her her life. It was a letter written by her sister Bertha, and if they (the magistrates) would hand her (Mrs. Spaulding) a tin box that was on the mantelpiece, she would show it to them as proof of her lady's innocence.

(At this point Mr. Macgruther was taken suddenly ill, and Sir Philip had to continue the investigation alone.)

The letter ran :

‘BEST OF SISTERS AND WOMEN,

‘Tell my darling Dick that he shall have his wicked way. I agree with you that one marriage for money is enough for a small family like ours. What breaks my heart is leaving so many beautiful presents behind.

‘BERTHA.’

‘ There were several other letters found in my lady’s desk, showing that she opposed the marriage of her sister, and one from Mrs. Heath expostulating with her for this. I did not know that the gentleman who has been carried out was Mr. Macgruther. I think you ’ (addressing Lord Wadehurst) ‘ should have told me, but it cannot be helped. I hope you will forgive me for the trouble I helped to bring upon you. I was assured that you were dead.’

Shown a locket and chain which Lord Wadehurst had brought from the courthouse, the deponent recognised it as having been the property of her late mistress. She thought it was a birthday present from his lordship made before her marriage.* The contents, when last she

* Lord Wadehurst says this is so.—P.S.

(the deponent) saw it, were a lock of Sir Claude's hair and a four-leaf clover which he had picked in the meadows during their honeymoon, and given her for luck. Notwithstanding all her sorrows, Lady Gault was superstitious about this locket, and wore it deep down in her bosom.

Asked if Lady Gault had ever injured her right hand, she said: 'Yes. It was during the first serious attack made upon her by Sir Claude, after which she ran away to her parents in London. She tried to ward off a blow, but it fell on her middle finger and broke it.'

Asked how she came to sign a declaration that her lady had been murdered at Havre, she replied: 'To save my father from a threatened prosecution for perjury. It did not seem to matter much then where she died, and I was so tangled up

in plots and deceptions that I could not help it. Besides, I had just received the injury which is killing me, and was not aware of all I did.'

*The Statement of Stephen Spaulding, a
prisoner in Poundbridge Gaol.*

A parson got hold of my wife at Dieppe when our children died, and told her it was a dispensation of Providence. It was a dispensation of dirt. Our house was on the cliff, not three furlongs from the sea, with a drop as high as this gaol ; but the French fool who built it was too stingy to make a proper drain. Diphtheria broke out, and mine were not the only ones to go. There were nineteen deaths in ten days, and—according to the parson—there must have been nineteen dispensations. But she heard him, and took con-

fession on the brain. Well, her old brute of a father got me into a pretty tight place, and I'm glad to be out of it. What she says don't hurt me. I'm lawyer enough to know that a wife's evidence don't go against a husband, and you won't get anything out of *me*, beyond what is wanted to prove that Faith Goulding went to Havre with old Martin. There are a dozen people in London who can prove that. There's the lady (Mrs. Joy, No. 135, Havelock Place) where she lodged ; there's Wyke and Parsons, who made up her new clothes and things, and lots of others.

When I was sent to pack up Lady Gault's things, I found that gun-stock they make such a fuss about in a drawer with some muslin gowns, and I chucked it away. It was all rusty, and no use. That boy Pell is a liar. As for the shoes

and rubbish they found in my old room, let them prove I put them there. Perhaps they put them there themselves. 'Tis over six years since *I* lived there.

That's all I've got to say, and you can make the most of it. I have a good lawyer now, and anyone who goes on with this ridiculous charge of murder will have to sweat for it. I call on old Martin to produce that paper which Sir Claude Gault signed, owning up that he killed his wife by accident, and that I wasn't in it.

This is the paper referred to above, found amongst the effects of the prisoner Wickham Martin, when they were brought from Dieppe by the police.

'For the protection of those who assisted me in my sore distress, I make this solemn declaration :

‘On the night of November 17, 1880, in a paroxysm of jealousy, which I now know to have been unfounded, I inflicted an injury on my wife which caused her death. I only intended to frighten her into an explanation of circumstances which at the time were full of suspicion. I threw her down upon a soft bed, and but for an unfortunate slip, which brought her head in contact with the wooden frame, no harm could have been done. Her maid, Mary Martin, was the only person present. It was an accident ; but I am told that I used language which, if repeated in a court of justice, would place my conduct in a very serious light. I am, therefore, precluded from making this declaration public.

[Here is a well-marked crease in the paper, showing that it had been folded so

that the attesting witnesses could see nothing but Sir Claude's signature.]

‘ CLAUDE GAULT.

‘ Witness,

‘ EDWARD J. MEALEY,

‘ PETER BROOKMAN.’

A rough statement of account in pencil, with Sir Claude Gault, for money expended for F. G., was also found, containing these items :

	£	s.	d.
Ry. Fare, etc., to Tavistock and back (two)	1	2	6
Paid Wyke and Parsons (outfit F. G.) . . .	78	1	4
„ Madame Geirgesta	37	4	8
Board and lodging F. G., three weeks . . .	9	17	6
Box and sundries	5	5	0
Fare to Havre (two) and back (one) and exs.	10	0	0
My services (say)	50	0	0

Mem.—To think of some more ; this isn't enough.

Two photographs of Faith Goulding and the following letter rewarded further search.

(*Printed.*)

‘Hotel des Ambassadeurs,

‘Havre.

‘MY DARLING CLAUDE,

‘Here I am in a strange country all alone, but I am not afeared. Mr. Martin has been very kind, but he cannot stay to see me of. He got a teligram in Paris calling him back. A young man from the steamer orfice, who can talk English, will see me on board in the mourning. Dear Claude, it is very sad to leave you, but I will do all I am told to do for your good. I shan’t be happy till I see you again. Dear Claude, I will be faithful and true, and wait patient for you to keep your promis. No one ever loved you like your poor little Faith. Dear Claude, you must write to me often and I’ll write to you thro Mr. Martin, who will give you this.

Now I am going out to buy some things I
wornt, so good-by for the present, with
× × × × × you know, from

‘ Your ever loving

‘ FAITH.

‘ P.S.—Take care of poor old auntie.’





CHAPTER XV.

‘HE LIES LIKE TRUTH.’

*The Statement of Wickham Martin,
Esquire, Attorney-at-Law, late of
Baltimore, in the county of Cork;
written by himself as a voluntary ex-
planation of his conduct.*

I will begin by stating that I have the utmost respect for the Laws of my country. I agree with Mr. Justice Blackstone that Law is the perfection of reason. I wish I could go further, and say that those who administer it invariably reach perfection as reasoners; but I cannot. The

Law is always right — the lawyers occasionally wrong ; and all philosophical minds should rejoice at an opportunity for correcting them. Take (as an example) the death of Frances Lady Gault. The law would have been made to call it murder, if my daughter Mary had not interposed. Murder is the wilful taking of human life with malice aforethought. Malice is presumed from actions, motives, threats. My daughter Mary, if put upon oath, would have been obliged to say that Sir Claude twice over threatened to kill his wife if she did not disclose the secret confided to her. She refused to do so, and he *did* kill her. The lawyers would have hanged him—for an accident ! My daughter has the satisfaction of knowing that she saved the Law from sharing in this mistake. Considering the quality of

her only available assistance, her success was perfect. The personation episode was carried out most creditably. I do not think that I could have arranged it better myself. The so-called *discharge* was a masterpiece. It is at this point that I came forward, and, fortunately for all concerned, assumed command of a case too large now for their management. Our main object was to gain time, in which Sir Claude's affairs could be arranged in case of a protracted residence abroad, and a proper provision made for his friends. Whilst this was in progress, I learned that Mr. Richard Birkett had disappeared ; that his uncle (the then Lord Wadehurst) had employed a detective agency to search for him ; that his cousin was dying ; and that the affection between them was such that no ordinary considerations would keep

the missing man from his side. I also employed detectives, found out all that the others knew (which amounted to nothing), and satisfied myself that the young gentleman was out of the way for some time to come, if not for good. I knew all that was taking place at Wadehurst. The old lord talked to Mr. Barbour, he talked to Spaulding, and he reported to me. The Honourable Frank Birkett (who might have been in his cousin's confidence) was dead. Then perhaps the most brilliant idea that has ever struck a brain not remarkable for want of resource occurred to me. Why not make out that Mr. Richard Birkett and Lady Gault had eloped! No contradiction could come from the lady—the gentleman was not to be found. All the circumstances favoured such a proposition. I caused a broad hint

of this to come (anonymously) to Messrs. Spiers and Co.—the agency employed by Lord Wadehurst—and almost simultaneously with it his lordship was good enough to furnish what appeared to be conclusive corroboration. This was contained in a letter left behind by Mr. Richard for his cousin, respecting his intended flight with Lady Gault's sister, but the wording was such as to make it apply very aptly to Lady Gault herself.

There had been some sort of informal engagement between my daughter and Mr. Spaulding. It never had my approval; and now I had other views for her. I intended her to be the next Lady Gault, and although beset with obstacles which would have deterred most men, I gained my point. There was not much difficulty with Sir Claude, who was full of morbid

fears of discovery. I pointed out that Mary was the only witness present on that sad occasion when he became a widower ; that he might betray himself under the influence of—let us say, *excitement* ; and that he could effectually silence her as a witness against him by making her his wife.

I won Spaulding over for a consideration. The marriage was to be such only in name—a mere form for the protection of the nominal husband. Sir Claude’s life was a bad one. He might relapse any day into his habits of intemperance, and then the end would be swift. Mr. Spaulding agreed that the prospect of becoming master of Fairlock Manor and eleven thousand a year was worth waiting for. Having no ideas outside of a stable, he was not aware that there are such

things as marriage settlements, and I did not enlighten him.

With Mary I had a harder task. I do not think she cared much about her groom, but she was full of fear for her safety with Sir Claude. And really there was some risk.

This arrangement was completed, and all seemed right, when a hitch came into the divorce case. The judge insisted upon our serving the parties with notice, and here again is an instance of imperfection in the administrators of the Law. Sir Claude was a free man. No divorce was required to enable him to marry again ; only, owing to the possible mistake into which (as I have before observed) the Law might be induced to fall, he could not say so.

By this time I had what I considered

reliable information, from a friend who had been induced to leave Chicago owing to some experiments in dynamite, that Mr. Richard Birkett had been killed in a cyclone. The lawyers were consequently requiring us to do what one of the Law's fundamental principles forbids.* We could not be expected to perform an impossibility. If any moral blame can be attached to what I did under these circumstances, it must fall on the lawyers who made it necessary. I maintain that I released the Law from a false position.

I might reproduce here, with advantage, the report which I sent home from Mexico. It is written with the verisimilitude and accuracy of detail which those who are familiar with my writings are good enough to consider one of their principal charms.

* '*Nemo tenetur ad impossibile.*'

But I will refrain. I returned from that interesting country with what I propose to call *a lubricant*. I applied it to the halting wheels of justice, and they revolved again !

Mr. Spaulding is one of those persons who (according to a metaphor which he will understand) 'cannot stand beans.' The 'consideration' already mentioned was a handsome one, and should have satisfied him for life ; but he had gone (he will be familiar with the term) on 'a swagger,' and desired to keep it up. When he learned that my daughter's fortune, as Sir Claude's widow, was strictly tied up for her own benefit, irrespective and independent of any future husband, he was greatly disappointed. He did not consider the allowance (ample as it was) that she made him sufficient for his needs.

With the delicacy of feeling which the straw-yard develops, and the regard for truth cultivated on the race-course, he has accused his wife of being an accomplice in the relapse of her first husband, and he attempts to found this slander upon a telegram she sent him at the time. He had been pestering her with letters, containing many impertinent questions, and this message was intended to pacify him.

My daughter's conduct as Lady Gault is irreproachable. It is no part of a wife's duty to interfere with the arrangements of her husband respecting his male attendants. Considering the position Mr. Spaulding had once held towards my daughter, it would not have been commonly decent for him to accompany the bridal pair. If Sir Claude had desired another keeper, he could have engaged one. He had been

sober for many months, and if the arrangements (made entirely for his good, and at a painful sacrifice upon my daughter's part) became irksome to him, that is no fault of hers. She did her best to control him, and in the hotel where they lived he did not misconduct himself. He slunk out secretly to the wine-shops at the back of the Palais Royal, and drank mixtures of potato spirit and fusel-oil out of bottles branded 'Cognac,' and that was his end—the natural end of an habitual drunkard. I regret having to employ such a harsh expression, and should not have used it with regard to poor Sir Claude were I not forced to do so for my daughter's vindication. The accusation was made out of spite, and not disconnected with a clumsy attempt at black-mailing, and was properly resented both by myself and my daughter.

He soon began to neglect her for the more congenial society of jockeys and touts, and so I gave up bachelor life in Paris (which was a very pleasant one), and devoted myself to her and her dear children in the second-rate watering-place which she had selected as a home. If she had taken my advice, and established herself in her own house (I allude to Fairlock Manor), a deplorable catastrophe would have been averted.

The reappearance of Mr. Richard (now Lord Wadehurst), and his quixotical endeavours to rehabilitate the first Lady Gault, caused me some uneasiness. Here allow me to repeat the words of an exceedingly wise man: 'I can hold my own with the knaves, but may the Lord protect me from the fools.' I am told that Mrs. Macgruther is a leading light in London

society. This enables me to appraise London society. Mrs. Macgruther has no more sense than is attributed to the proverbial colt ('Thompson's colt'), who swam across the river to get a drink of water. Her obvious policy was to let Lord Wadehurst severely alone ; but she goaded him into an investigation which has (eventually) destroyed her. In this I feel that I am not entirely blameless. I could have made at least five hundred a year out of her (under pressure of the letter which I could have obtained at any time from my daughter), and have controlled her actions ; but I was magnanimous enough to refrain. This I shall take as a warning never again to neglect my opportunities.

I must now go back a little in my narrative of events. For the purposes of Sir Claude Gault's divorce it became

necessary to remove Miss Faith Goulding out of reach of his brother's lawyers, who were after her. I was too quick for them. Suppressing immaterial details, I took her as far as Havre, where she was to ship for New York. I could not see her embark, having been recalled by a telegram from Spaulding stating that Sir Claude was becoming restive. I never heard what became of her. I fancied that she had picked up some new admirer amongst the golden youth of the Empire City, and was glad to be rid of her. From Havre she wrote a letter to Sir Claude and sent it under cover to me. Of course I did not deliver it; and this is fortunate, as it helps to establish her identity. I have it still. I kept it because (as already stated) Sir Claude had become somewhat restive just then. It was possible that he might

break with me after all I had done for him, and so, in self-defence, I was obliged to keep something which might be disposed of with advantage to the other side. Such ingratitude as I believed him capable of, could not be allowed to pass unpunished. However, the restive fit wore off, and was followed by good conduct.

Now I touch the first link in a chain of fatalities. Lord Wadehurst stumbled on what had actually happened to the girl Goulding, and, misled by some expressions which fell from her in her delirium, sprang to the conclusion that she was Frances Lady Gault. When he blundered out his assertion that she had been murdered and I knew it, my heart jumped into my mouth ; but almost in the same breath he added ‘*robbed* and murdered,’ and then I knew he was on a false scent. This faculty of

rapid perception is peculiar to me. Spaulding was present, and his stupidity nearly ruined us.

‘Out of the nettle danger I plucked the flower safety.’ I could not help leaving some sting behind, but the general result was satisfactory. Lord Wadehurst’s inconvenient quest was brought to an end. My little departure from truth was condoned. The exposure of our sham proceedings for divorce did not matter, and I enabled Mrs. Macgruther to draw back from the foolish, and even dangerous, position she had assumed. And this without a thought of recompense from her! The only real cause for regret was the accident which befell my dear child, my beautiful Mary! and which—followed by the loss of her children—appears to have unhinged her mind. I do not blame her

for the confession which I understand she has made. It can do no harm, and will tend to extricate me from a position of some difficulty.

In a few days the authorities will find that they have no case against any of us. Mary Spaulding's statement exonerates me, by showing that the remains found in the bed of Fairlock Lake are not those of Faith Goulding. It is not evidence against the late Sir Claude Gault, because he became her husband. Neither is it evidence against Spaulding, as an accessory after the fact, because he *is* her husband now. It is only evidence against herself, and as such you must take it as you find it. Do you suppose that any jury would convict her as accessory after the fact *to an accident*?

To sum up :

I am not responsible for the accident to Frances Lady Gault.

I am not responsible for the murder of Faith Goulding.

The case of *Gault v. Gault and Birkett* was a nullity.

The marriage of my daughter with Sir Claude was a valid one.

I have guided the Law into its right course, and prevented several failures of justice.

(Signed) WICKHAM MARTIN.





CHAPTER XVI.

‘GOOD-BYE!’

WHEN the foregoing statements were made public, the great world was unanimous upon one point only, viz., that Mr. Wickham Martin was the most plausible scoundrel of his age. It accepted the downfall of Mrs. Mac as complete, but found many excuses for her. It could not afford, you see, to admit that its idol of so many years was composed of common clay. That would be to stultify itself. As compensation, the female division revenged itself on Mary Spaulding, and tore her to bits.

She had helped to kill her mistress, so that she might marry her master ; and she had placed drink in his way in order to get rid of him, and take up again with that dirty dog, his groom. The male division thought her a deuced clever woman. Both divisions were sorry for Lord Wadehurst, as the sincerity of his grief could not be denied ; but there were many who did not believe in him. It was all right, of course, *now*, about the first Lady Gault, only he should not have made up that Havre story. The idea of mistaking an ignorant dairymaid for such a woman as poor dear Frances !

Macgruther (now raving with brain-fever—not expected to recover) was more fairly considered. He must have known that his wife had been in love with Dick Birkett, and did not care a snap of her

fingers for him when he married her. If he had not been so cold or hard, she might have told him all about it, and no doubt he would have forgiven her. Still, it was 'hard lines' on him, poor man!

In the only world that Dick cared about, his sorrow was shared and his vindication complete. Taking unstinted blame for the boyish folly which had cost one life and threatened another, he told Stella and the Applejohns the plain, unvarnished story of his life. They believed and pitied him, and one of them loved him none the less.

'When you promised to be my wife,' he said, after all was told, 'you did not know what I had done. I did not know myself all the misery that I had caused. I am not the man you took me for, and so I give you back your promise.'

‘Is this because you have ceased to love me?’

‘It is because I love you so dearly that I do not dare to link your blameless life with mine, so full of stain.’

‘There is no stain except from the sins of others. You are morbid, my Dick. Whenever you can look me in the face and say that I cannot make you happy, then I will give you back your promise—but it will break my heart.’

Her true heart is unbroken to this day. Mark Applejohn’s sound common-sense took this view:

‘You honestly thought that you was trying to save that gal’ (meaning Miss Bertha Heath) ‘from a miserable marriage, and I don’t see that you have much to fret about. You’re fretting over a lot of *ifs*. *If* you hadn’t done this, then somebody

wouldn't have done t'other. Put the "if" back where it belongs. Say you did run away together, and she had turned out good — you'd both be all right now, wouldn't you? Macgruther would have learned that he couldn't buy a wife, and a wedding-cake would have bin spoiled — that's all! Who brought in the trouble? Why, no one but that lying, stuck-up hussy! (meaning Mrs. Mac). 'She's the one to blame for the bottom of it. Stick the "if" on to her.'

Dear old Mrs. Goodlake, having given evidence before the magistrates as to the sudden disappearance of Faith Goulding and the condition of her room, thought that the dream of her old age was to be fulfilled, and she would at last 'get even' with *that* Spaulding. But it was not to be so.

The Right Honourable Alexander Macgruther never appeared again in political life. After a long and painful fight with death, he regained physical strength ; but his once strong brain was hopelessly shattered. I do not mean to say that he lost his reason—that remained. What he lost was all incentive to use it. He lapsed into a silent old gentleman, who roamed about sunny places in Southern Europe, devoted to two little boys who were his only companions. There was no public scandal. His wife (very wisely) effaced herself, and was not heard of until his death, when she turned up in Paris, and in two months was married to a Polish Count—a strikingly handsome man, but poor as a rat, and subject to emotions which frequently led to unpleasantness.

The authorities were reluctantly com-

pelled to confirm the opinion expressed by Mr. Wickham Martin, so far as it related to his daughter and son-in-law ; but they held him for perjury committed in the case of *Gault v. Gault and Birkett*, and Dick (relieved of his bargain by the exposure of the fraud upon which it had been based) had no hesitation in prosecuting. The prisoner pleaded guilty 'to save trouble,' as he said, and made a speech in mitigation of punishment, which the judge stigmatized as a tissue of the grossest and most immoral sophisms that he had ever listened to.

Mary was spared the sorrow of knowing this, as death put an end to her sufferings shortly after the publication of her confession.

I do not know, and really I do not care, what became of Mr. Spaulding.

The Rev. Mr. Barbour got Langley, after all ; for Percy Stanring (for whom it was intended) insisted upon returning to his London slum.

‘God has given me back my health,’ he said. ‘It is His, and must be used in His service.’

‘And if it breaks down again, what then ?’ persisted Dick.

‘Do not let us borrow trouble, dear old man ! The Master will provide.’

Barbour was delighted. Two hundred and thirty pounds a year more pay ; one hundred and forty less parishioners to bother him ; and not a Bethel in sight for twelve miles !

‘I do not see,’ said his wife, ‘that we shall be any better off than we would have been with that young man’s two hundred and fifty.’

‘My dear love, remember what you said about the value of the glebe; you forget the glebe.’

‘I do *not* forget the glebe, Barbour. It will only be an incumbrance. I doubt if we can let it in these hard times; and if we did, perhaps we should not get our rent. As for farming it ourselves, that is out of the question, on account of your gross ignorance.’

‘I never had a chance of learning anything about farms,’ he pleaded.

‘If you had, you would have thrown it away.’

That is the last we shall hear of Mrs. Barbour. The Rector of Langley is not so fortunate.

Dick took his bride to America, and they spent nearly a month at the Mariposa, which was found flourishing. Told

that this was the English lord who held almost all her stock, the miners showed signs of irreverence. They didn't want no la-di-das bossing *them*. Told that he was one of the four who had held up the mine, working day and night ; wet, hungry, ragged, robbed by a faithless companion, set back by every sort of disappointment, but never daunted—they nearly shook his hand off, and thereafter always called him ‘boss,’ a higher title in their eyes than earl.

Stella also received ‘honourable mention,’ being spoken of as ‘that there daisy,’ and always addressed as ‘lady’—not ‘my lady,’ or ‘your ladyship,’ but ‘lady,’ pure and simple.

Dick has acquired—partly by gift from the aunt who loves him, and partly by purchase from the other one, who drove

a hard bargain—all the land of which he had been dispossessed.

Wadehurst House has become one of the 'show places.' The housekeeper is a dignified person in steel-gray silk and lace caps, whom we have known as Patsey. Woe to the maid who dared to call her 'Patsey' now! John Killick is bailiff, and gets on pretty well; but I fancy that he shines in light borrowed from his clever wife.

Lord Wadehurst has made his mark in Parliament, having stumped the Colonial Office on several occasions on subjects connected with the colonies, and especially Australia.

This is due to the coaching of Mark Applejohn, and fills him with delight. Old Mark has become somewhat stingy of late. His ruling idea is that Lord

Langley (Dick's second title), aged four, is not to crow over the Honourable Mark Birkett, aged two and three-quarters, because he happens to be the elder son. There is 'a pile' forming for old Mark's little godson.

Stella is a happy woman, which is better than being *grande dame*. She often drives over to Fairlock with her children to see if a certain grave is kept in good order, and that the flowers around it shall always be in bloom. It was once marked with another name ; now it bears that of FRANCES GAULT.

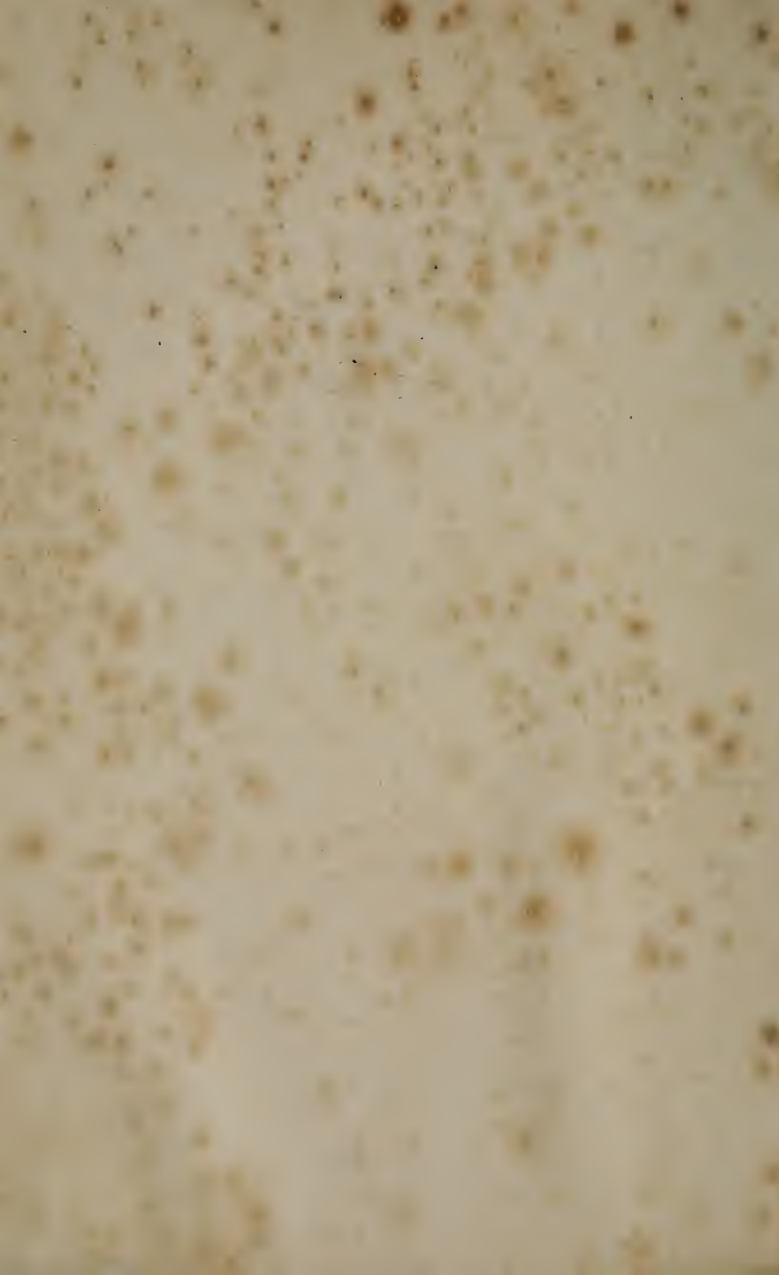
Those poor remains were left in peace. It would have been desecration to mingle them with the dust of the man who had murdered her happiness and killed her body. The children, happily ignorant of death and graves, know only that the

flowers are kept there in loving memory of a poor lady who was papa's dear friend. They kiss the roses when they go, and wish her 'good-bye.'

And so good-bye to all !

THE END.















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